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THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY . . .

VOL. I

Elizabeth, Empress of Russia

THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By FITZGERALD MOLLOY, Author of
"The Romance of Royalty," "The Sailor King: His Court and His Subjects," &c.

WITH 2 PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECES AND
16 FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS ON ART PAPER

VOL I

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PREFACE

NO period in the history of Courts, and no Court in any history, can furnish so vital, so surprising a drama as that which was played in St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century. Set in a framework of barbaric splendour, and enacted by men and women of primitive passions, we watch absorbedly the startling intrigues of council chamber and anteroom; the barter of souls; insurrections; archaic cruelties; the breathless pursuit of pleasure and power, ending in terrible tragedies—all in a quick succession of acts more stirring, more daring, than any which invention could conceive.

Strange as were the individualities of those who preceded or succeeded the Empress Catherine II., hers was stranger and more strong. This Princess of a little German state, who by force of will and magnetic personality climbed to the throne of All the Russias to which she had no claim, and cemented her clutch upon it with the blood of her husband, remains the central figure of this perturbed time. Around her

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are the lovers she elected. Dauntless and fierce, youthful and full of the grace of adolescence, or hideous, masterful, and avaricious, they stand—beautiful, bizarre, or grotesque—against the background of her gorgeous Court like figures painted in flaming crimson and Tyrian purple on a frieze of burnished gold. To the student of human nature the character of this Czarina presents the absorbing fascination of one who, while otherwise splendidly sane, suffered from moral aberrations, and became acquainted with sins surrounded by strange circumstances, whose variety and turpitude might be doubted but for the frank unabashed confessions contained in her Memoirs.

These Memoirs, long hidden in dusty archives; the interesting dispatches and papers of English Ambassadors accredited to the Muscovite Court, preserved in the State Paper Office and the Manuscript Department of the British Museum; the correspondence of the foreign ministers who were their contemporaries; and the authentic histories of the times, are the authorities for this work, in which absolute facts alone are given.

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THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

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STANDING brown and battered beside the frozen waters of the Neva—steel-grey under keen blue

skies—the old wooden Winter Palace of St. Petersburg was, on a day in November 1743, the scene of a memorable meeting; for within the closed and guarded doors of its council chamber a subject was being discussed and decided whose paramount importance, not only to those present but to the whole Russian empire, none could foresee or imagine.

The subject under consideration was the proposed marriage of the rickety, half-witted heir-apparent to the throne, the Grand Duke Peter, whose union it was piously hoped might produce issue that would secure peace to Russia; for owing to a law framed by the autocratic Peter the Great, which made the succession dependent on the will of the ruling sovereign, the Imperial crown had been since his death a mere plaything in the hands of avaricious adventurers. Peter the Great, whose strong hand had striven to knout his country into civilisation, had shown his lack of it by having his only son, the weak and rebellious Alexis, murdered. On Peter's own demise in 1725, the crown had been boldly seized by his second wife Catherine, a fascinating virago who was the illegitimate daughter of a Livonian peasant. Beginning life as a servant, she had married a soldier, and had subsequently been the slave or mistress of a score of generals, from one of whom, Menschikoff, Peter had taken her to make her his lawful wife. That she had been placed on the throne to the exclusion of Peter's

grandson, the heir of the unfortunate Alexis, was due to Menschikoff, who though holding the highest position in this vast empire, had formerly trudged through the streets of Moscow as a vendor of cakes ; so that it was considered a sardonic stroke of fate that a scullery-maid had been raised by a pastrycook to the throne of All the Russias.

Catherine filled her high position for two years, her death having been hastened by her reckless dissipation. She was succeeded in May 1727, by Alexis's son, who as Peter II., had reigned less than three years when he died of smallpox. After him came Anna, a niece of Peter the Great, the daughter of his elder brother who had predeceased him. Within twelve months of her marriage with the Duke of Courland, she had been left a childless widow. Her moderate grief was quickly soothed by the devotion of Biren, a man of low origin, great ambition, and with a leering smile, to whom she gave not only the privileges of her late husband, but his title and his property, the province of Courland which Russia had filched from Poland. Despotically ruling Russia during the ten years of Anna's reign, he is estimated to have put to death not less than twenty thousand persons, while he had banished to Siberia a yet greater number who had dared to resent his unlimited sway or to conspire against him.

In October 1740, it became evident that the death

of the Empress was near. Those who had suffered under her cruel reign showed their forgiving spirit in beseeching Heaven that her sufferings might not be prolonged. Before the end came she summoned to her bedside her niece and namesake, the daughter of a sister who had married the Duke of Mecklenburg. This German princess, who was inordinately fat and frowsy in appearance, had been married to a foolish young man with a round face and mild blue eyes, Anthony Ulric, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburgh, to whom she had borne a son named Ivan. As an ambitious heart beat within her obese bosom, she had always hoped she should succeed as Empress. Her disappointment was therefore great when she learned that her infant son was to be proclaimed Czar on the death of Anna, with the detested Biren as Regent; for in this way had his influence, dominant to the last with the dying woman, secured a prolongation of his power. Though he had treated the nobles as vagabonds, had wrung from the people immense sums that had paid the mortgages on his estates, had executed and banished thousands, yet with the blind admiration of self common to egotists, he regarded himself as popular. Those who seemed to him the sole persons likely to attempt his downfall were the Princess and her husband; but having threatened to send them back to Germany in case he discovered such a conspiracy on their part, he rested satisfied

that they would never risk such a crushing punishment.

His eyes were opened in more senses than one when on November 9th, 1740, he was arrested in his bed, bound and gagged, and together with his wife taken away shivering in their nightdresses to the guard-room of the Winter Palace. Early on the following morning the nobles were summoned to Court, when the Princess Anna was appointed Regent during the minority of her son, and raised to the rank of Grand Duchess with the title of Imperial Serene Highness. To celebrate this change, Orders were freely distributed to the officers who had brought it about; the debts of the nobles were paid; a Te Deum was sung; the Duke of Brunswick was appointed Generalissimo of the army; and Biren after being despoiled of all his rich possessions and all his wealth even to his watch, was confined in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul as a preliminary to being banished to Siberia.

Though wielding all the sway of a Russian sovereign, the new Regent was far from happy. Jealous and tenacious of her power, she refused to allow her incompetent husband to share it. Dissensions arose between them, he not only complaining that his Generalissimo was an empty title, but that Field-Marshal Münnich, who had chiefly helped to bring about the change, directed everything. In the latter charge the Regent was ready to agree with him.

Feeling herself secure in her position, she weakened it by detaching Münnich from her interests. He had, she said, overthrown Biren more out of ambition than from attachment to herself, and that although she might reap the benefit of his treachery, she could not esteem the traitor. She thought his disposition restless, complained that he had the boldness to contradict her husband's orders, and feared that he was not to be relied on. Her treatment of the field-marshal induced him to send in his resignation which she quickly accepted, and afterwards regretted, when it was whispered to her, though without truth, that he was seen constantly to visit one whom the Regent regarded with fear, while she sought to conciliate her with favours. This was the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great and of his second wife Catherine. A woman of imposing presence, Elizabeth was tall, stately, and graceful, her head magnificently posed on splendid shoulders, her hair bright brown and silky, her eyes deep blue and slumberous, her face round and fleshy, the nose large, the chin softly rounded, the lips full and crimson, the whole countenance indicating one devoted to pleasure.

In her eighteenth year she had been contracted in marriage to Charles, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, with whom she had been deeply in love, but who died within a short time of the date fixed for their marriage. Her resolution never to marry had then been taken,

not from devotion to his memory so much as that she might be free to follow her inclinations wherever they led. As a daughter of their idol Peter the Great, she was popular with the people, who also loved her for herself because of her personal charm of manner and the lavish freedom with which she spent her wealth ; while certain proclivities of hers were overlooked by the populace, accustomed to the immoralities of those in her class. That she might be kept in a state of contentment and goodwill, she received handsome presents and an increase of income from the Regent ; who was also considerate enough to dismiss from her service a handsome guardsman who had found favour with Elizabeth, "that he might always be at her commands," as she said.

Indolent, loving ease, believing that the great object of life was the enjoyment of pleasure, and shrinking from the cares of sovereignty, it is probable that Elizabeth would never have exerted herself to end the regency and have herself proclaimed Empress, if certain operations had not forced her to that act. The chief of these was the attempt made to induce her to marry the Regent's brother-in-law, Prince Louis of Brunswick, who would have carried his bride to Germany, where she would be safe from all political intrigues. On her immediate and absolute refusal to consider such a marriage, it was hinted that she might be obliged to spend the remainder of her days in the

seclusion of a convent. Than this no proposition could be more abhorrent to one of Elizabeth's temperament. The terror with which it inspired the Princess induced her to listen more attentively to the suggestions of two individuals who, while endeavouring to place her on the throne, were serving their respective interests.

One of these was the Marquis de La Chétardie, a man of ancient family and elegant appearance, fastidious, witty, an adept in political intrigues, and so eager to support his dignity that, as is related in the Memoirs of Russia by Baron de Manstein, a resident at the Court of St. Petersburg during this critical period, he would not deliver his credentials to the Regent unless in the presence of the infant Czar. As however the Royal children in Russia were at this time never shown in public until after they had passed their first year, a difficulty arose in granting his demand, and it was only after some months had been wasted in correspondence between him and Count Ostermann, the Chancellor, that a compromise was arrived at and he had a private audience with the infant Emperor, while the Regent stood by. Having orders from his Court to stir up intestine troubles in Russia, so that the latter country should have sufficient occupation in looking after her own affairs to prevent her from interfering in European politics, the Marquis de La Chétardie considered he could best carry out these instructions by plotting against the baby Czar, and placing on the

throne a sovereign who was believed to be favourable to France. With this end in view he willingly supplied the extravagant Princess Elizabeth, not only with sufficient money to pay her debts, but to form a party whose loyalty could be strengthened by gold.

That he might not be compromised, this was passed through the hands of Armand Lestock, who was chiefly responsible in bringing about the revolution that placed Elizabeth on the throne. Born at Hanover, Armand Lestock had as a boy entered the service of Peter the Great. On taking his degrees in medicine he had been appointed by the Empress Catherine surgeon to her daughter the Princess Elizabeth, who had taken him into her favour. For a while her natural indolence and aversion to trouble prevented her from acting on his urgent advice that she should take initiatory steps to gain the sovereignty of Russia. Meantime, while listening to her counsellors, she continued on excellent terms with the Regent—whose temperament resembled her own—visiting her privately and appearing at Court on occasions of ceremony. These, however, were not frequent, for the Regent was indolent, shy, and retiring, and according to Baron de Manstein, often remained for several days together shut up in her room, with no other dress than a petticoat, a short cloak, and a nightcap made out of a handkerchief. Here she played cards, gossiped, and yawned, while she "suffered the most important affairs to languish."

A glimpse of one of the rare occasions on which she appeared in public is given by the Hon. Edward Finch, English Ambassador to the Russian Court, whose dispatches preserved in the State Paper Office give many interesting details of the Imperial Family. The Court ceremony to which he refers celebrated the birthday of the little Czar, who "was brought in Mademoiselle Julia Mengden's arms, for whom he has taken a great affection. She carried him through all the apartments, and every time she called 'Majesty' he put out his little hand to be kissed. The whole Court was extremely delighted with his beauty, healthful look and behaviour, as he himself seemed to be with the crowd he saw." It may be worth mentioning that among the vast throng of Russian and Polish nobles present in their splendid costumes was the barbaric figure of Krosno Tzockin, a chief of the Don Cossacks, then a power to be reckoned with in the affairs of Russia. This man, the English Ambassador tells us, had turned seventy, but still had "a great deal of desperate brutal courage. He has knocked off several score of his prisoners heads, sometimes in cold blood, sometimes in drunken fits, but always, as he says, to keep his hand in, and has been wounded all over his body, on which occasions he only makes use of human fat by outward application, and inwardly a glass of brandy."

Both at this ceremony and at the ball which followed the Princess Elizabeth was present, her imposing

figure and voluptuous beauty showing to perfection in the magnificent dress she wore, her face lit with enjoyment of the scene, and apparently so innocent of political intrigue that she remained unsuspected even by her enemy Count Ostermann, who told Finch that her "sentiments of love and affection to Russia were too great to allow her to give in to any such projects as the placing of herself on the throne." As however the English Ambassador was not so sure what the future might bring, he wrote home that "at all events it would be advisable to treat Elizabeth with prudence, not to offend her in any way, and supply her with sufficient money. For as she is addicted to her pleasures, she will squander all the money she can get upon them, which may not only lessen her character, and of course diminish her popularity, but also while she is not pinched in her extravagances, we may say of her, as Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar says, 'Her Highness will be too fat to be in a plot.'"

Though the wily Chancellor, Count Ostermann, who had Elizabeth watched, entertained little suspicion of her, the weak and slighted husband of the Regent had doubts of her loyalty which he confided to Finch. Spies had assured him that the Marquis de La Chétardie often visited her, "even by night and in disguise, and as there was no indication of gallantry in the case, the motives must have been political." The

Duke of Brunswick added that if Elizabeth's conduct appeared equivocal, she would be shut up in a convent, which, says Finch, "I believe of all things in the world would not please her, and might be also a dangerous expedient, for she has not one bit of nun's flesh about her, and she is extremely well beloved and very popular." These suspicions were communicated to two others, Count Ostermann and the Regent. The former at once consulted the English Ambassador on the advisability of having Lestock arrested, and was told that he must be the best judge as to how he should act, but that for various reasons such a step might be injudicious. Ostermann then suggested that Finch should ask Lestock to dinner, when under the effects of wine, the physician might make revelations. To this no answer was made for, writes Finch, "I believe that if ambassadors are reckoned to be spies for their masters, they are not spies for others." The Regent, more direct in her dealings, openly taxed Elizabeth with striving to upset the existing government, a charge the Princess heard with apparent amazement, followed by indignation at such a sinister suspicion. She declared herself incapable of breaking the solemn oath of loyalty she had taken to the Emperor, and that those who had accused her of disloyalty did so from enmity and to render her unhappy. Finally, when the Regent threatened to have Lestock arrested, her

cousin seemingly approved of that step, which she said would be certain to prove her innocence. She then burst into a storm of tears, when the Regent, remorseful for the accusations she had made, cried for company's sake and embraced her.

On returning to her palace the Princess Elizabeth, who was conscience-stricken and trembling from fear, immediately sent for Lestock and told him what had happened. Assuring her there was not a moment to lose, he urgently begged she would that very night take the step which might place her on the throne. But she who dreaded the result of failure, and whose habit it was to postpone, would not consent to such prompt action. Leaving her in despair he returned next morning, when he handed her a card on one side of which she saw a portrait of herself seated on a throne with the Imperial crown upon her head; while on the other side she saw herself wearing the habit and veil of a nun; beside her were racks and gibbets. As she looked with horror at this picture, he said to her, "Your Highness must now choose which of these you will be; an Empress who can reward her servants, or a nun who will see them miserably perish under tortures." He then extorted a promise from her that she would act that very night, on which he hurried to acquaint her supporters and prepare for their attempt.

Had Elizabeth known how perilous was her position at that moment, she would probably never have attempted to gain the throne, for on the same day the Austrian Ambassador, the Marquis de Botta, had warned the Regent to take heed. "You are on the brink of a precipice," he said; "in the name of God save yourself, save the Emperor, save your husband." Indolent, and certain that her own perceptions were right, she paid as little attention to him as she had to her husband, who that very evening, within a few hours of the revolution, told her he had fresh reason to suspect Lestock of plotting against her, and that he would have him arrested that night; on which she forbade him, saying she had spoken to Elizabeth and was assured of her innocence. Baron de Manstein, who relates these incidents as a proof of the Regent's fatal blindness, gives what he considers a further proof of it by saying that Elizabeth often visited the barracks of the guards, who were her chief partisans. The four regiments of the guards consisted of picked men of splendid physique whose officers were taken from the highest nobility and wealthiest families in the Empire; and who were in themselves sufficiently influential to cause a revolution. Elizabeth was not only on terms of intimate friendship with the officers of these regiments, but as Baron de Manstein says, "she suffered some of the common soldiers to get behind her open sledge and talk to her as she was drawn along through

the streets of St. Petersburg. She had every day many of them in her palace, and affected to make herself popular upon all occasions." It could hardly have been possible that the Regent was not aware of this intimacy; but that she did not attribute it to political motives is probable.

The night came—December 5th—when the conspirators determined to make a supreme effort to place Elizabeth on the throne. Long after the frozen streets were empty and silent, when the city was settled in sleep, and the lights had one by one gone out at the Winter Palace leaving it dark and bleak, there secretly entered her palace by different doors those who were ready to risk torture and death in an attempt that would give her the Imperial crown and themselves rich rewards. The story of the insurrection is told by several writers—ambassadors and diplomatists, all of them contemporaries—with more or less detail. Seated at a table in her private room, her friends around her, the Princess, who scarcely spoke, looked pale and agitated. The dread of bloodshed for her supporters, and of lifelong seclusion for herself in case of failure, was more vividly before her than the splendid prospect of sovereignty and unlimited power if she succeeded. The knowledge that a score of Grenadier Guards summoned by Lestock and heavily bribed by him were in an adjoining room, gave her little courage, for she knew that they who

were now ready to obey her would as readily act as her jailers if fortune did not befriend her.

While those around discussed their plans in low voices, she suddenly rose and going to a corner of the room where a golden lamp flung its light upon an ikon, threw herself upon her knees and bowed her head in prayer. It was then she vowed that if placed upon the throne, she would never permit the execution of one of her subjects so long as she reigned. When she rose she held a silver cross uplifted in her hand, and with this she passed into the next room where she faced the soldiers. Meeting their eager glances, she asked if she might depend upon their loyalty, to which they answered in a body that they were ready to die for her. Then much moved she said to them, "If God be merciful to us and to Russia, I will never forget your devotion. Go back to the barracks, assemble your comrades with all speed and secrecy, and wait my arrival. I will soon follow you." She then left them to put on a mail cuirass under her dress. As an additional protection she also placed her silver cross within the bosom of her gown. The great clock in the fortress was striking one when, wrapped from head to foot in furs, she softly stole into the street, where the frozen snow contrasted by borders of dark houses, gleamed a ghastly white under clear skies and brilliant stars.

The sleigh awaiting her in a shadow of the palace

took her swiftly and silently to the Preobrazhensky barracks where the guards, ready for desperate action and excited by its prospect, impatiently awaited her. Many of them had enjoyed the personal friendship of the Princess, and had received proof of her generosity, which it was believed would be increased by the importance of the service they were about to render her, and by the additional wealth this would place at her command. They received her with enthusiasm, and with boisterous words and rough oaths of fidelity followed her to the mess-room in a crowd. Here she faced and smiled at her friends, and then gave them her first order, to slit all the drums, so that in case of danger they could not sound an alarm. Then, her stately figure erect, her handsome face flushed, she told them that she, the daughter of Peter the Great, had determined to deliver them and all Russia from their German tormentors, and asked if they would follow her. With a savage yell they declared they would follow her to death, and cut the Germans to pieces. To that she replied that there must be no bloodshed. Next taking the silver cross from her breast she held it above her head, saying, "I swear before heaven to die for you; will you swear to die for me?" A deafening shout assured her of their loyalty. "Then let us go," she said, and all prepared for action.

Placing herself at their head, she marched with

the men—three hundred in number, all with their bayonets screwed and grenades in their pockets—to the Winter Palace. Here the surprised and sleepy guards made no resistance one or two excepting, who while they hesitated were arrested. The Princess then placed her own guards instead of those she had found, and with a few others in her wake went to the Regent's bedroom. Waking suddenly, the latter was startled to see herself surrounded by lights and armed men ; then her glance fell on her cousin, and she understood all. Elizabeth at once assured her that she need have no fear, for that neither herself nor her children should suffer. The poor woman, disillusioned, fallen from her high estate, and not knowing what might befall her, rose and dressed, and was then carried in her own sleigh to Elizabeth's palace. Here she was presently joined by her husband and her two children, the sometime Emperor wailing pitifully at being suddenly taken from his warm cradle, surrounded by rough soldiers, and driven through the night to a place that was strange to him.

Almost at the same time that the Czar and the Regent were arrested, Elizabeth had made prisoners of Ostermann, Münnich, Count Golovkin, the Vice-Chancellor, and Baron Mengden, all of them Germans. This indignity was spared the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Peter Lacy, a brave soldier and a brilliant

Irishman who had fought at the siege of Limerick for James II., and had fled with his Royal master to France. His achievements in the wars of his adopted country had attracted the notice of Peter the Great, into whose service he entered, and from whom he ultimately received a marshal's bâton. At this time his victories were nearly as numerous as his years, and Elizabeth having a special regard for him, not only for his own sake but as a loyal follower of her father, was unwilling that he should meet with dishonour at her hands. Her messengers were therefore sent to inquire in the first place to which party he belonged. His reply delivered with a twinkle of his blue-grey eyes was worthy of a courtier, "To the party in power." At that he was taken to Elizabeth's palace where a regiment of horse guards and three regiments of foot guards were stationed. Passing through anterooms filled with officers and officials, he found her seated at a council table surrounded by those who were to become her ministers, and who were busily drawing up a manifesto. Kissing her hand, the old soldier declared himself happy to serve the daughter of his former master, on which her face brightened, and impulsively stretching out her hands she clasped his.

A steely light had scarcely crept into the winter sky before the firing of cannon from the fortress awoke the alarmed city, and on its becoming known

that this salute announced a change in the sovereignty of Russia, the nobles thronged to the Empress, while the people, excited and joyous, came hurrying into the square in front of her palace. Increasing in number every moment, they waited in the nipping air for a sight of her, shuffling to and fro to keep their blood from freezing, and calling on their Little Mother, until at last a window was flung wide open and Elizabeth, majestic and imposing, stepped upon the balcony and with a swelling heart bowed again and again in acknowledgment of the ringing cheers of her subjects. Soon after she set out in state for the Winter Palace, the residence of the sovereigns, preceded by the Preobrazhensky Guards, surrounded by her nobles, and followed by the entire population whose enthusiasm assured her of popularity.

Reaching the palace she went straight to the Imperial chapel where a Te Deum was sung to celebrate this bloodless insurrection. Then going to the council chamber the oath of allegiance was administered to the nobles, to all ecclesiastics, and to the military, and Elizabeth was proclaimed sole sovereign of All the Russias. Her first act was to reward those who had helped to place her on the throne. Foremost among them were the Preobrazhensky Guards. Not only did she distribute twenty thousand roubles among them, but she conferred on them the title of Imperial Bodyguard, and declared herself their captain. Every

private soldier among them was given the rank of lieutenant, every corporal was made a captain, and every sergeant a major, while the ensign was promoted to a brigadier, and a well-favoured first lieutenant was made a lieutenant-general. Moreover, all of them were quartered in houses close by the Winter Palace. Nine thousand roubles were given to two other regiments respectively, and two of the gentlemen of her household, Peter and Alexander Schouvaloff, were made colonels in the Guards.

But these rewards were as nothing to the favours heaped on Armand Lestock, who was made first physician to Her Majesty, a Privy Councillor, Director of the College of Medicine with a salary of seven thousand roubles a year, and finally a count. The Empress also gave him a miniature of herself set with diamonds worth twenty thousand roubles, which he wore suspended by a blue ribbon round his neck. These high honours turned his head: he considered himself of supreme importance, and as Finch in writing to England said, his "ordinary discourse is a continued egotism." His importance was sufficient to make his favour worth buying, and the English Ambassador, Sir Cyril Wych, who succeeded the Hon. Edward Finch soon after Elizabeth's accession, states that he "prevailed on him to take a pension from his Majesty the King [George II.] of yearly six hundred pounds. He was highly gratified, pro-

mised much, but at the same time is paid by France." Not only England and France, but Prussia also thought it advisable to bribe him, while the King of Poland was so anxious to live in his memory that he sent Lestock his portrait which was set in diamonds to render it more acceptable.

Nor was the Marquis de La Chétardie forgotten. Not a day passed that her Majesty did not hold long conferences with him regarding the political situation that then troubled her, but which it is unnecessary to enter into in pages devoted to personal history rather than to affairs of state. Because of this and other favours shown him by the sovereign, he was regarded with supreme deference by the home and foreign ministers, while the courtiers abased themselves before him. "The first bow is to her Majesty, but the second is to M. de La Chétardie," says Sir Cyril Wych, who in another dispatch adds: "The French Ambassador still continues prime minister. Great court is paid to him: he publicly kisses and is kissed by the janissaries in the drawing-room."

Rewards having been freely showered on all who had aided Elizabeth to the sovereignty, which as a daughter of Peter the Great was now declared to be her lawful right, punishments followed on all who had hindered her from previously exercising it. The late Regent with her husband and two children were first banished to the melancholy sea-girt fortress of

Schlusselburg. According to Finch, a subaltern officer was sent after them "to give one of the Grand Duchess's chambermaids the knout, without saying why." Later they were moved to Kholmogori in the arctic region of Archangel, where in a poor wooden house close to the shores of the White Sea and backed by desolate forests, they dwelt in great wretchedness. Fortunately for the Regent, death brought her miseries to an end before many years; for early in 1746 she died in giving birth to a child. Her husband, a broken-spirited man, survived her many years, while their son Ivan met with a tragic fate as will afterwards be told.

They had scarcely left St. Petersburg when a commission was held to try Count Ostermann, Field-Marshal Münnich, Count Golovkin, Count Lowenwolde, High Steward to the late Regent, Baron Mengden, her confidant, and her secretary Temiryazev. Ostermann was charged with having suppressed the will of Catherine I., in which she had named her daughter as her successor. An accusation equally false was brought against Münnich, who it was stated had won over the soldiers to depose Biren by telling them he was about to place Elizabeth on the throne. Their real fault, together with that of their companions in misfortune, was that they had faithfully served the late Regent and had not intrigued in favour of the new sovereign. The English Ambassador states that

her Majesty was constantly present at this commission, which he calls an inquisition, "for there is nothing in this country, at least in such cases, which deserves the name of court of justice." She sat where she could see and hear everything without being seen, "as she says, to prevent favour or injustice. This declaration, with the general confiscations previous to any hearing in defence, cannot be reconciled but by the constant practice of this court on such occasions. They speak also of the application of the knout to the prisoners."

The trial, which was conducted with great inhumanity, "by the express commands of those who were present to prevent injustice," lasted about two months. The result was that Count Ostermann was sentenced to be broken alive upon the wheel, and that Münnich should have his hands cut off and then be decapitated and quartered; the others were to be beheaded. Early on the morning of January 30th, 1742, a vast crowd of men, heavily clad, and with fur caps pulled forward to their cruel and eager eyes, gathered in front of the college where a scaffold had been erected, to watch these barbarous sentences carried out. Presently they saw Count Ostermann being led forward between soldiers, aged and bent, his grey hair falling on his shoulders. The chief object of Elizabeth's hatred, he was made to stand bareheaded while a list of his supposed crimes, filling five sheets of paper, was read

to him. The terrible wheel on which he expected to be broken was not visible, but in its stead was a block, an axe beside it. To this he was led and his head placed upon it, while his shirt was unbuttoned and his neck bared with slow deliberation by an executioner instructed in the subtleties of cruelty. Then as he waited for the blow that would send his soul into eternity, an official stepped forward to announce that God and her Majesty gave him his life. Raising himself slowly he buttoned his shirt with shaking hands, and in a dazed way, looking at the executioner said, "Give me my wig and cap again."

Field-Marshal Münnich, shaved and carefully dressed, erect, intrepid, and as unconcerned as if he had been at the head of an army or at a review, then had his sentence read to him. But instead of this being carried out, he also was told that his life would be spared. The same happened to the others who had been condemned. All of them had their properties confiscated to the Crown, and were banished to the remotest and most severe parts of Siberia. On his way to his destination, Pelim, a dramatic incident happened to Münnich. He who had overthrown Biren and caused him to be banished to the very place to which he himself was now being taken, came face to face on the high road with his enemy, whom Elizabeth had recalled. Without speaking a word, but with undying hate in their eyes, the two men

stared at each other from their passing sleighs which bore them respectively to exile and to liberty. Elizabeth, who by the way was called the Clement, wished to recall from Siberia all who had been sent there during the reign of the Empress Anna, but of these, says Baron de Manstein, "there were five thousand whose habitation could never be discovered, nor the least news learnt of what had become of them."

The new reign did not settle down with the peacefulness and security that might have been expected from the popularity with which it had been hailed. The rough and semi-savage nobles who under penalty of incurring the sovereign's displeasure, were obliged to attend the Court ceremonies that were now of frequent occurrence, secretly rebelled at having to appear there. Loving above all things to live at ease on their vast estates, where they exercised supreme power over the life and death of their miserable serfs, they detested the capital where restrictions and such civilisation as it could boast of were forced on them. There was not one of them, according to Finch, who did not wish St. Petersburg at the bottom of the sea, and all the conquered provinces at the devil ; so that they could remove to Moscow, where being in the neighbourhood of their properties, they could live in greater splendour and with less expense. "They will have nothing

to do with Europe," he adds; "they hate all foreigners, and would, at the most, only employ them in war, and then get rid of them. They equally abominate all voyages by sea, and would rather be sent to the very worst part of Siberia than on board a fleet."

Such civilisation as the capital possessed, especially in the first months of the new reign, was nothing to boast of. After dark the streets, badly lit and in general floored with rough planks, were deserted, the inhabitants not daring to venture abroad lest they should be assaulted and plundered by the soldiers of the guard. Those made lieutenants by the favour of her Majesty, Baron de Manstein tells us, "ran through all the dirtiest public-houses, got drunk and wallowed in the streets. They entered into the houses of the first noblemen, demanded money with threats, and took away without ceremony whatever they liked. There was no restraining within bounds men who, having been all their lifetime used to be disciplined by drubbing, could not at once familiarise themselves to a more civil treatment."

How little civilised Elizabeth was, how great a share of her father's brutal nature she inherited, was proved at an early stage of her reign. Though the narration of what follows is horrible, it is given as an illustration of her character and of the barbarous usages practised in Russia in her day. The leading

character in the tragedy to be related as briefly as possible was Natalia Fedorovna Lopukhina, who next to Elizabeth, was the most beautiful woman at the Court of St. Petersburg, and had been in the service of the late Regent. Though as such she was not likely to gain the friendship of the new sovereign, yet the latter appointed her to the post of lady-in-waiting. It may have been the delight of rivalling her Majesty if only for a single night, that led this foolish woman to dress for a Court ball in the colours that best became her Imperial mistress, and that therefore were forbidden to the ladies of the Court. On the Empress entering the ballroom, a glance showed her Natalia Lopukhina looking radiant in the prohibited pink colour ; when summoning her to her side and sending for a pair of scissors, she cut the roses from her hair and ended by violently and passionately boxing her ears before the whole assembly.

The bitter resentment which this action naturally begot was added to when Natalia Lopukhina's lover, Count Löwenwolde, was banished to Siberia. Various interesting details of Elizabeth's amours and free comments on her character were communicated by Natalia Lopukhina to her friend Anna Bestuzheva, whose marriage with Count Michael Bestuzhev the Empress had striven to prevent, and who in that way made another enemy. Walls that had ears had also tongues that soon repeated their words, which

were exaggerated into treason by others, Lestock among them, for purposes of their own, and not unwillingly accepted as such by the sovereign, who knew that this crime was punishable by dreadful tortures. Colour was given to the charge of treason from the fact that Natalia Lopukhina carried on a secret correspondence with her lover Lôwenwolde, who had been a friend and supporter of the late Regent, and who was now a political prisoner ; and that some letters had passed between her and the Marquis de Botta, who had been recalled from Russia and sent to Berlin. Determined to prove if possible a charge which would give his Imperial mistress her revenge, and that he hoped would ruin the growing powers of the Bestuzhevs, Lestock employed a minion to ply with drink Natalia Lopukhina's son, a young lieutenant-colonel, and extract compromising information from him.

This scheme succeeding, the lad's father and mother, Count Michael Bestuzhev, his wife and his step-daughter, together with eighteen others, were arrested. Under terrible torture young Lopukhina confessed anything and everything required of him, but the letters and papers belonging to all concerned, which had been seized, showed no trace of a conspiracy. Nor did the agonies which both men and women endured at the whipping-post and on the rack wring from them a confession of treason. For all that, at

the end of a trial that lasted twenty-five days Natalia Lopukhina, her husband and her son, together with Anna Bestuzheva, were condemned to be broken alive on the wheel, and have their tongues cut out before being beheaded, while all the others, with the exception of Count Michael Bestuzhev, were sentenced to death. This was eventually mitigated to a whipping and perpetual banishment for the minor offenders ; while the Lopukhinas and Anna Bestuzheva were to be publicly knouted and have their tongues cut out. The horrible scene which followed must be briefly dealt with. On a brilliant day in August (1743) Natalia Lopukhina mounted the scaffold erected in front of the public offices, and looked down on a surging, eager, cruel crowd. Still beautiful notwithstanding her recent sufferings, she was also dignified and calm until the rough hands of the executioner tore the dress from her bust. Roused by this indignity she strove to retain her covering but strove in vain, and in another second a fierce blow of the knout dealt with the full strength of a barbarian fell upon the naked flesh. Then amid agonising screams for help and pity, stroke followed stroke in slow succession until her delicate skin was torn to ribbons and she was bathed in blood. When the allotted number of blows had been given, she was flung upon the boards of the scaffold and her throat seized by iron hands until her tongue protruded, when it was cut off. The same

barbarous punishment was then inflicted on her husband, her son, and her friend the Countess Michael Bestuzheva, after which all of them were banished to Siberia.

Elizabeth had scarcely been seated on the throne when it was thought desirable that she should appoint an heir and in this way give security to the empire. Though at the time of her succession she had barely reached her thirty-second year, yet no idea of begetting lawful heirs seemed probable to her Majesty, who decided to send to Germany for her nephew Karl Peter Ulric, a son of her eldest sister Anne, who had married a Duke of Holstein. This grandson of Peter the Great, who was now in his fifteenth year, had lost his mother when he was but two months old, the poor lady, it is said, dying from grief at finding herself married to an ugly sickly little man, and mistress of so poor a court. Her husband following her eleven years later, their son was brought up under the care of his uncle, Adolphus Frederick, Bishop of Lubeck and Duke of Holstein. Small for his years, the boy's legs seemed scarcely able to support him, while his body, without being hunchbacked, was twisted and uneven in the shoulders. A long narrow face with small eyes retreating forehead and shelving chin was not made more attractive by a sallow complexion and abundant pimples. Long thin arms and weak-looking hands, complete the semblance of a youth

whose mental and physical deficiency were painfully apparent.

Neglected by his guardian and never having had any education, he was from his earliest youth the associate of barrack-room companions, whose manners and habits he had readily acquired. Dressed in uniform he believed himself to be a soldier, his chief qualifications for which were his ability to swear and drink ; and attracted by all relating to the army, he worshipped Frederick the Great as the embodiment of the martial spirit. Left to himself he would have preferred to live and die a Duke of Holstein or a King of Sweden, to the throne of which he had claim ; but an evil fate made him heir to the crown of All the Russias, a position for which of all others he was least fitted. Sent for in haste by his aunt, he reached St. Petersburg on February 5th, 1742, when this degenerate grandson of Peter the Great was received by her with surprise, and with ceremony by the nobles, who addressed him in a language of which he did not understand a word, and kissed the dirty hand he awkwardly held out to them.

Though it must soon have become obvious to the Empress that she had made a mistake in the selection of her successor, yet there was none other to fill the place of the banished Ivan ; but from the first it was evident that there was neither affection nor sympathy between them, an impression that strengthened to

conviction before long. The first thing to be done was to instruct Karl Peter Ulric, who had been brought up a Lutheran, in the tenets of the Orthodox Russian Church, with a view to his reception into its fold. This office was undertaken by Simon Theodorsky, the Archimandrite, who subsequently became Archbishop of Pleskov. While in Germany there had always been a difficulty in getting Karl Peter Ulric to attend religious services, and now in Russia pious instruction seemed to him an intolerable boredom which he sought to diversify by lolling out his tongue and winking at solemn Simon Theodorsky. Though the good man had infinite trouble with a pupil who so far as he could make himself understood, disputed every statement made to him, yet within twelve months he was declared fitted to become a member of the Church. He was then taken by the Empress to Moscow, where she was to be solemnly crowned and he publicly received into the national faith. The latter ceremony took place on November 18th, 1742. In the Imperial Chapel, ablaze with wax lights and jewelled ikons, and crowded with a congregation that included the Empress, the foreign ministers, and the high officers of Court and State, the Archbishop of Novgorod, with a score of bishops in copes of cloth of gold, prepared to receive Peter into the Church of which he should one day be the visible head. Kneeling before the gates of the Holy of

Holies, in an atmosphere heavy with incense, while priests prayed above his bowed head and ancient chants rose in bursts of heart-moving melody, the sadly bored and unbelieving youth abjured Protestantism, pronounced the required confession of faith, was baptised by the names of Peter Fedorovich, anointed, and given the Sacrament. Later he was proclaimed Grand Duke of Russia and lawful heir to the empire. Unpromising as he was, it was hoped that a sensible wife would remedy his defects, or at least produce him heirs to whose guidance Russia might look hopefully forward. Where to find such a princess became an anxious question. The first selection fell on a sister of Frederick, King of Prussia, but he knowing something of the Court of Russia, and more of Peter who had been his guest, declined the proffered alliance, while at the same time he recommended as a suitable bride for Peter, Sophia Augusta Frederica, daughter of Prince Christian Augustus of Zerbst-Dornburg and of his masterful wife the Princess Jeanne Elizabeth of Holstein.

The suggestion of Frederick the Great met with the opposition of the Vice-Chancellor, Count Alexis Petrovich Bestuzhev, who considered that an alliance with a daughter of the Elector of Saxony would best serve the interests of the empire. Various ministers had candidates to offer for this matrimonial prize, but Elizabeth's selection fell on the Princess Sophia, chiefly

from a feeling of sentiment which, by one of those odd contradictions in human nature, largely swayed the nature of a woman capable of such cruelty. It will be remembered that when in her eighteenth year Elizabeth had been betrothed to Charles, Duke of Holstein, whose death she had never ceased to regret. Had she married him, the probability is that with her temperament she would not have remained faithful to him six months ; but there are many who preserve an abiding affection for those from whom fate has parted them ; an affection which owes its glamour to the imagination, and that would never have survived personal experience. Elizabeth was one of these. Everything belonging to the man who was to have been her husband, was viewed with tenderness, including his sister the Princess Jeanne and her daughter the young Princess Sophia. Without loss of time both were summoned to St. Petersburg, and as they were poor and the journey expensive, a draft for ten thousand roubles was forwarded to them at the same time.

Gladly, with high hopes, they set out on January 12th, 1744, for the Russian Court, some details of which have been given in the foregoing pages chiefly to indicate the surroundings into which this young girl stepped ; or in other words to prepare the way for the entrance of one of the most singular characters that ever played a part in the great drama of history.

CHAPTER II

The Princess Sophia sets out for Russia—A trying mother—Personal appearance of the Princess—She has the power to please—Remembrances of her future husband—Troubles which disturb her father's soul—He presents her with a book—At the Court of Frederick the Great—Appearance of that monarch—A journey through Russia—A view of its capital—Hurrying to Moscow—Reception by the Empress—The Princess Sophia prepares to play her part—Attacked by pleurisy—Sends for the Archimandrite—At the Troitsa Monastery—The Vice-Chancellor's triumph over the French Ambassador—The Princess is received into the Orthodox Church and is betrothed to the Grand Duke—Entertainments of the Court—Elizabeth's leg is praised by English ministers—Catherine's debts—The Grand Duke's illness—Catherine studies her philosophers—Sees the Grand Duke for the first time on his recovery—Her remarkable tact—Her devotion during Lent—Her marriage—The Empress approves of the Grand Duchess—Peter confides in his wife—He spies on the Empress—Her Majesty's wrath—Their Imperial Highnesses are treated as State prisoners—They are surrounded by spies—A hint of future revelations.

BORN in May 1729 at Stettin, where her father, who was in the Prussian service, resided as Governor, the Princess Sophia, called by her family Figche, had not yet reached her fifteenth year when she set out for Russia. Her father, a slow-moving, dull-witted, good-natured, beer-drinking prince,

round of girth and gentle of manner, had married as might have been expected, an alert, ambitious, shrewish woman. That the severe training she gave her only daughter served to develop rather than to crush her character speaks for its strength. From the first the child, who had no sympathy with and little affection for her trying mother, showed not only a bright intelligence but a decided individuality, and a will which it was her habit to concentrate on anything she desired, in the belief that by such means she could obtain it.

With its aquiline nose, its firm full-lipped mouth, its pointed and protruding chin, her face was dominated by a high, wide forehead, "in which there was room for everything," while her dazzlingly fair complexion was contrasted by her abundant chestnut hair and well-marked brows above eyes so grey a blue as to seem brown, and so magnetic as to be unendurable to those on whom they were steadily fixed, and to startle those on whom they were turned in searching inquiry or sudden anger. That she was short in figure was a blemish she sought to remedy by holding her head erect on its long well-turned neck, a habit that added to her natural dignity of bearing. Frank in all things about herself, as will presently be seen, she used to declare that in her own opinion she was not beautiful, but she would add, "I have the power to please, and that I think is my greatest gift."

This summons to the Court of St. Petersburg, conveyed by a special messenger, set her vivid imagination aflame, and gave a distinct object to the ambition which had often disturbed her inner life, and made her dream of playing a great part in a scene worthy of the powers of which she was intuitively conscious, and in whose extent she believed. Nor was her ardour damped by the thought that the sphere of her activities might lie in a semi-barbarous country, far removed from kinsfolk and friends. And though she may have shrunk from the idea of becoming Peter's bride, she was consoled by the remembrance of the position she would gain as his consort. For she had seen Peter on one occasion when she went to stay with his guardian and her uncle, the Prince Bishop of Lubeck. She had then found the boy, who was in his eleventh year, weak and sickly in constitution, grey-complexioned, thin, and delicate in appearance, and "tormented with restraints only calculated to teach him falsehood as well in character as in deportment." It was at this time that she heard it stated in the presence of the family that he was inclined to drink, his attendants finding it difficult to prevent him from getting intoxicated at table.

Little time was allowed for the preparation of wedding garments, but Sophia's uncle gave her "a piece of blue and silver stuff" to make a gown, while her

father, less solicitous for external appearances, and more inclined to economy, presented her with a book. Underneath the flabby physique of this excellent man there existed a soul whose uneasiness regarding his daughter's future no quantity of beer could soothe. Bred as a Lutheran in its most rigid and least tolerant form, he charitably believed that all who held religious opinions that differed from his own must be damned. Though aware that it would be expected of her as a Grand Duchess to conform to the tenets of the Greek Church, he could not find it in his heart to decline so great an honour for Sophia, even while he was unwilling that she should burn for ever. In a vague way he considered it possible that some compromise might be arrived at by which she could become a Grand Duchess and yet remain a Lutheran; and to effect this he gave her a copy of Heineccius on the Greek Religion that she might clearly see the errors it exposed of that ancient Church. Judging by her subsequent acts, the girl must have smiled pityingly at his simplicity in imagining that she would allow any thought of another world to stand between her and the glory of this.

Hastening to her prospective bridegroom, Sophia and her mother travelled as fast as hired horses could carry them. For a day or two they rested at the cheerless, unsociable Court of Berlin, where the presence of a woman was seldom tolerated by Frederick II., who

has been called the Great, and who though forced by his tyrannical father to marry, had never lived with his wife. For three days they were allowed to rest in the palace of this parsimonious, dirty, eccentric, and satirical monarch, whose habit it was to wear his blue coat pieced, his breeches patched, while his waistcoat was powdered by snuff, and his bald head covered by a long queue and false curls. That he extended such hospitality as they received to the Princess Jeanne and her lively daughter was due to the fact that fearing Russia, which he regarded as his greatest enemy, he was anxious that the elder Princess should strive to establish friendly relations between himself and Elizabeth, of whose political plans and views, and of whose Court and favourites, he desired to be kept secretly informed. Having given her careful instructions to co-operate with Lestock, who was in his pay and whom he believed to be in his interests; to take council with his minister Mardenfeld, and to use all her endeavours to overthrow the influence of Vice-Chancellor Bestuzhev with his sovereign, he hurried their departure. Already elated at the prospect of becoming the mother-in-law of the heir to the throne of Russia, the Princess Jeanne's sense of importance rose to its height at being employed as a spy by this great sovereign, the execution of whose mission was to bring her humiliation and discredit.

A journey through Europe was at this time long

and wearisome, but through Russia it was irksome and intolerably dreary. For the most part the roads were made of the trunks of trees, placed in rows parallel to each other, and bound down in the centre and at each side by poles fastened to the ground by wooden pegs. Over these were laid layers of boughs, which were then strewn with sand and earth. When these roads were new they were fairly good, but as the trunks rotted or sank into the ground, and the earth and sand got washed away by rains, the jolting of a carriage on the rough timbers racked the frame, while holes still concealed by the boughs into which the horses stepped made them perilous to man and beast. Travelling in this way the Princesses passed through a desolate land whose wide-stretching fields, sewn in spring-time with hemp, grain, millet, and flax, were at this season black and frost-bound. Now and then they passed wretched villages with wooden cottages, whose doors were so low that a full-sized man could not enter them without stooping, having neither windows nor chimneys, but with outside staircases. Occasionally they drove through desolate, dark, and tangled woods that seemed endless, and were glad to reach the post-houses erected at long distances from each other where weary travellers might rest. These were large wooden buildings quadrangular in shape, three sides of which were used as stables and sheds for carriages and cattle, while the fourth was

furnished with straw beds and benches on which wayfarers might rest their shaken bones. Strange were the people they saw ; sullen, heavy, brooding, coarse-featured, mild-looking peasants, with hair hanging over ears and eyebrows, and cut short round the neck, their faces scarred by frost-bites as if singed with hot irons, their coats of sheepskin with the wool turned inwards, the trousers of sackcloth, woollen cloths wrapped round their legs instead of stockings, their sandals made of strips of bark.

After long weeks of travelling, often by night as well as by day, they reached St. Petersburg. To those accustomed to such traces of ancient civilisation as existed at Zerbst, with its mediæval town hall, its Gothic churches, its palace black with age and its historic houses, the Russian capital must have presented a chilling aspect. But forty years before, the space on which it stood was a morass occupied by a few fishermen's huts. The fortress, the only building at that time of earth and stone, had these materials carried to it by labourers in the skirts of their clothes, and in bags made of old mats, the use of wheelbarrows being unknown to them. Even now in 1744, most of its houses and churches were built of timber, their roofs covered with tiles and earth, a few only of the dwellings of the nobility being constructed of brick covered with white stucco, while the only stone building in the capital was the new fortress. Its

habitations and public edifices being far apart and straggling, the city suggested an immense outline; and standing upon the Neva, not far from the Gulf or Finland, it was, under the direction of certain winds, subject to inundations and occasionally threatened with total submersion.

The feeling of dreariness which the bride-elect and her mother must have felt on entering St. Petersburg was increased when they learned that the Empress and her Court had gone to Moscow. Their disappointment was, however, lessened by the reception they met with from the officials left behind for that purpose. A salute was fired in their honour, a banquet was given to them, and when they were sufficiently rested to continue their journey to Moscow, a distance of some five hundred miles as the crow flies, a sleigh splendidly upholstered in scarlet and silver, lined with sables, and big enough to hold feather beds on which they could lie at full length, was placed at their service.

On February 9th, 1744, after a journey which had not been without danger, mother and daughter reached Moscow, which the English Ambassador, who was there at the time, described as "the most disagreeable and the dirtiest place I ever was in." On their arrival at the Imperial palace they were immediately summoned by the Empress to her bedroom, where she was in the habit of spending hours in gossiping

with her ladies-in-waiting. As the strangers entered, dishevelled, chilled, and weary, Elizabeth languidly rose and embraced them, looking long and approvingly at the girl, and then turning to the mother, in whose features she recognised some resemblance to her betrothed, tears rushed into her eyes.

It was not until the following day that Sophia saw Peter in his new surroundings. On his arrival in Russia he had been given a suite of apartments in the Imperial palace for himself and the two or three members of his suite whom he had brought with him from Holstein. Without occupation of any kind, never consulted about affairs of state, left in absolute ignorance of the internal condition of the empire he was one day to govern, seldom permitted to visit her Majesty, and never allowed to walk or drive abroad without special leave, he was treated more as a state prisoner than as heir to the throne. At first he had received instructions from Isaac Wesselowsky in the Russian language, but as Peter had no desire to acquire any knowledge of it, and preferred to speak barrack-room German and slipshod French, these were soon discontinued. The visits of Stehlein, who professed to teach mathematics and history, were more welcome, as he played with his pupil, whom he served as a buffoon; while M. Laude, who taught him dancing, was made a favourite. But his chief delight and almost his sole occupation was to make his

servants go through the military exercises he had learned in Germany. One day these men were given rank and titles, which on another were taken from them. "It was truly child's play, and a constant childhood. In general indeed he was very childish, although at this time he was sixteen," writes his future wife in her remarkable Memoirs.

The break in his monotonous existence occasioned by the arrival of her mother and herself seemed to give him much pleasure, and for the first few days, while the novelty of her presence lasted, he showed her great attention. "Even then and in that short time," says she, "I could see that he cared but little for the nation over which he was destined to rule; that he leaned to Lutheranism; that he had no affection for those about him; and that he was very childish." On the other hand, she who was a year his junior, was intelligent, precocious, observant, and determined to please all whom it was her interest to conciliate. Listening in silence to Peter, she gained his confidence. "I remember his telling me, among other things," she writes, "that what most pleased him in me was that I was his cousin, as he could therefore from our near relationship open his heart to me with entire confidence; and hereupon he went on to inform me that he was in love with one of the maids-of-honour to the Empress, who had been dismissed from Court in consequence of the

misfortune of her mother, Natalia Lopukhina, who had been exiled to Siberia ; that he would have been very glad to have married her, but that he was resigned to marry me instead, as his aunt wished it. I listened with a blush to these family disclosures, thanking him for his premature confidence, but in reality I was astounded at his imprudence and utter want of judgment in a variety of matters."

Without loss of time and with extraordinary application, the young girl began to prepare herself for the position she was determined to fill. By Simon Theodorsky she was instructed in the Greek faith, which seemed to afford her a spiritual consolation she had always desired ; M. Laude taught her dancing ; and she received lessons in the Russian tongue from Basil Adadouroff. Aware that a knowledge of the language would, next to ardour for the Orthodox Church, please the Empress and the people, she studied it not only by day but by night, rising while others slept to con the tasks that had been set her. One February night when on leaving her bed for this purpose, she had neglected to put on her shoes, she caught a violent cold that turned to pleurisy and threatened her life. Beginning with a shivering fit, just as she had dressed to dine with the Grand Duke, her illness increased so rapidly that she was obliged to go to bed, though not without remonstrances from her mother. When the latter

returned from the dinner, she found her daughter in a high fever, and suffering from a severe pain in her side. Believing that the girl was about to have smallpox, the elder Princess sent for the doctors, who after the fashion of the time insisted on the patient being bled. To this her mother would not listen, saying that it was from being bled for small-pox that her brother (who had been engaged to Elizabeth) had died, and she did not wish her daughter to share the same fate.

News of the illness was sent to the Empress, who three days before had gone to visit the shrine of St. Sergius at the Troitsa Monastery, forty miles distant from Moscow. Before she could return, the patient grew worse, when her mother wished to send for a Lutheran clergyman, and would have done so had not her astute daughter, mindful of this earthly life even at a moment when its end seemed near, stopped her and declared she would rather see Simon Theodorsky. Accordingly the Archimandrite came and ministered to her, an occurrence that brought her much satisfaction, and "did me great service in the opinion of the Empress and of the entire Court." When at seven o'clock in the evening her Majesty returned, she went straight from her carriage to the sick-room, Lestock and a surgeon following her quick footsteps. Hearing the opinion of the doctors, she at once ordered the patient to be bled, an operation

that was repeated sixteen times within the next twenty-seven days, during which Sophia lay between life and death. As her mother protested against these bleedings and declared that the doctors were killing her daughter, she was scarcely ever allowed to enter the room. In her place the Countess Roumianzoff and some other ladies were appointed to attend on the young Princess, while the Empress visited her continually, and cried at seeing the change in her, for she was not only deadly pale from loss of blood, but wasted to a skeleton, and so ugly, as she says, that she could hardly recognise herself. However, she was able to appear in public on her birthday, when a delicate pink from the rouge-pot sent her by the Empress, gave her cheeks the semblance of health.

In May her Majesty returned to the Troitsa Monastery to resume the devotions which had been interrupted by news of Sophia's illness. For like most persons of emotional temperament, Elizabeth was easily swayed to opposite extremes, and by turns could abandon herself to voluptuous pleasures or to exalted religious fervour. The Troitsa Monastery, which had been founded by St. Sergius in the middle of the fourteenth century, was a place of special sanctity. Large tracts of land having been given to it from time to time by various Russian sovereigns, and buildings being added to it, the monastery gradually merged into a fortress. Its high brick

walls strengthened by massive buttresses and towers, and surrounded by a deep ditch, enclosed not only a monastery and barracks, but an Imperial palace and nine large churches, each built by a different ruler. In the largest of these, a building of white stone with a copper cupola, is the shrine of solid silver given by Ivan the Terrible to St. Sergius; while two ikons of the saint painted on portions of his coffin and kept in this church, have not only been carried into battles by the Czars Alexis and Peter the Great, but have been exposed during many fierce engagements of the Crimean and the Japanese war.

On this visit the Empress was accompanied not only by her chief ministers and Lestock, but by the Grand Duke, his fiancée, and her mother. It may have been to keep her out of harm's way and under her own observation that the latter was included in her Majesty's suite; for from the first the Princess Jeanne, a fussy busybody, filled with her own importance, and eager to play the part of an intrigant, had made herself disliked and suspected. Eager to obey the commands of Frederick the Great, and to gain his approval, she had at once attached herself to the party of the Marquis de La Chétardie, a bitter enemy of the Vice-Chancellor, Count Alexis Bestuzhev, who in turn was the most formidable opponent in Russia to his Prussian Majesty. The first of this able minister's forebears to land in this country was his grandfather, who hailing

from Scotland, had come to Russia in the suite of Peter the Great, and whose name Best, the Russian for beast, had been changed by the Czar to Bestuzhev, which is the equivalent to ruffian. A man of shrewdness and ability, he had amassed considerable wealth, which with his personal gifts he handed down to his two sons Alexis and Michael. Both were sent to be educated at Berlin and Copenhagen, and both becoming diplomats served as ministers in various countries, until on Elizabeth coming to the throne they were employed by her—Michael as Grand Marshal of the Imperial Household, and Alexis as Vice-Chancellor.

At this time (1744), the latter had passed his fiftieth year. A man of square face, with dark, impenetrable eyes, a wide, thin-lipped mouth, and large nose, his habitual expression was severe and melancholy. Silent as a rule, when he spoke his words were compact with meaning. Ambitious and jealous of power, he was ever watchful of his enemies, ever wary lest the fate that had befallen so many of his predecessors might as suddenly and as fatally overtake himself. An opponent of the marriage of the Grand Duke to Sophia, he had shown no pleasure on her arrival, while he had distrusted her mother as the protégée of Frederick. Aware that the man with whom she had openly allied herself, the Marquis de La Chétardie, was hungering for his downfall, Alexis Bestuzhev had him not only watched, but had his letters opened as they

passed through the Russian post-office. Suspecting this, the French Ambassador varied the style of his correspondence ; part of which flattered Elizabeth's appearance and extolled her wisdom, while the other part, written in cipher which he believed was so elaborately constructed as to be impossible of interpretation save to those who held the key, gave expression to his real sentiments regarding the Czarina, with details of her dissipated habits, her lovers, and her indolence.

Employing an official of extreme skill in the discovery of cryptic writing, the Vice-Chancellor was able to lay before her Majesty proofs that were best calculated to wound her, of the hypocrisy and disloyalty of the man on whom she had showered favours. Nor was Bestuzhev's triumph the less because the intercepted letters contained the name of one who sought to injure him in his sovereign's eyes, that of the Princess Jeanne Elizabeth, whom the Marquis spoke of as a partisan, though without more seriously implicating her. It was while the Empress was at the Troitsa Monastery that extracts from the Marquis's letters were laid before her, one result of which was that while the Grand Duke, Sophia, and her mother were talking and laughing in an ante-room, her Majesty suddenly burst upon them and angrily bade the elder Princess follow her. Some time passed, and the young people sitting on a window-sill were still laughing, when Lestock entering looked at them with a troubled

face and said, "This merriment will soon cease," and then turning to the girl added, "You may pack up; you are going to set off home at once." Peter, without showing much concern, but out of curiosity asked why, and was told that he would soon know. "But if your mother is in fault, you are not," said he to his fiancée, to which came the proper answer from this exemplary young person, that her duty was to follow her mother and do as she was bid.

"I saw plainly that he would have parted from me without regret," says she; adding, "as for myself, considering his character and sentiments, the matter was nearly indifferent to me also, but the crown of Russia was not so." As they waited, wondering what would happen the door of the inner room once more opened, and the Empress came out with a flushed face and an angry look, followed by the Princess Jeanne, whose eyes were red and filled with tears. The children scrambled down from the window-sill, and in passing Elizabeth kissed them. Probably Sophia's mother succeeded in excusing herself, for she was not sent away, though from that time she was treated with great reserve and coldness.

The sequel of this little scene had a more serious ending. Confident that he was still in high favour with the Czarina, the Marquis de La Chétardie supped pleasantly one evening with his friend Graf von Mardenfeld, the Prussian Ambassador. Returning

to his own residence late, he went to bed, but was soon after roused from sleep to hear that General Ushakvo, Adjutant-General to the Empress, who was accompanied by a number of the guards, wished to see him without delay. Wrapping himself in a dressing-gown, the startled Ambassador went downstairs, at the foot of which he was met by the General who peremptorily commanded him "to be gone with all possible dispatch beyond the frontier of the Russian empire." According to the account of this scene contained in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères, on asking why he was expelled, he was told that instead of being grateful to her Majesty for her many acts of kindness to him, he had tried to create a party of his own at Court, had sought to overthrow her Majesty's ministers, and had presumed with audacious temerity to describe and calumniate her Majesty's sacred person in his dispatches. His earnest protestations that he was incapable of such base conduct were interrupted by the General, who read him extracts from his letters describing the Empress as a frivolous creature of dissolute morals, and her Court as a hot-bed of depravity, together with details of his plans to overthrow Bestuzhev and bring Russia into an alliance with France, Prussia, and Sweden, against Austria. On hearing this damning evidence, the Marquis, fearful at heart of severer punishment, declared his readiness to obey her Majesty's commands. Within an hour he had quitted Moscow,

his carriage surrounded by a company of guards with drawn sabres who had orders to convey him to the frontier. On his way thither he was overtaken by a messenger from Court, who demanded of him the badge of the Order of St. Andrew and the portrait of herself given him by her Majesty, who was magnanimous enough to leave him the diamonds in which it was framed.

A few weeks later, after spending days in seclusion and pious contemplation, the Princess Sophia of Zerbst made her formal and fervent profession of faith, was baptised under the name of Catherine Aleksyevna, and received into the Orthodox Church. Her knowledge of the Russian tongue, as shown in the responses and affirmations, gave a satisfaction and delight to the Court that was only equalled by her profound piety. The following day, on the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, she received some share of its earthly reward when she was publicly betrothed in the cathedral of the Kremlin to the degenerate Grand Duke, given the style and title of Grand Duchess, and presented by the Empress with a magnificent diadem whose value in English money was about twenty thousand pounds. Then followed a series of state dinners, Court receptions, and brilliant balls, marked by all the splendour that was no less dear to Elizabeth than to Catherine. Though Prince Charles Augustus, Catherine's father, had his somnolent days in distant Zerbst brightened

by news of the honours that fell to his clever daughter, he was at the same time sadly disturbed by the thought that they were gained at the price of her eternal damnation, until his wife was kind enough to assure him, who was now intelligently open to conviction, that she had compared the confession of faith of the Orthodox Church with Luther's catechism, and "found no fundamental difference between them."

No sooner had the festivities in honour of the Grand Duke's betrothal ended, than a reaction induced the Empress to set out for far-distant Kief, which has been called the Jerusalem of Russia. The object of her visit was to pray at the shrine of St. Macarius, a Metropolitan of Kief who was decapitated by the Tartars in 1497, and whose relics are preserved in the cathedral of St. Sophia in this city. The journey was made in state, as she took over two hundred persons in her suite, among them being Peter, Catherine, and her mother; they at first travelling in advance of her Majesty, who desired to visit various monasteries and shrines on her way. This arrangement was not displeasing to the young people, each of whom journeyed in a separate carriage, until one day the Grand Duke becoming intolerably bored by his attendants, wished to join the lively and amusing Catherine and her mother. Once with them he would not leave them; when the Princess Jeanne becoming wearied of him, thought that she would add the

younger members of their suite to her party. The result was that their beds were taken from the carriage, which was arranged with benches, on which they perched themselves, laughing and joking. "And thus we passed the rest of our journey very gaily as far as our carriage life was concerned," writes Catherine in her Memoirs, "but all who were not with us protested against the arrangement. It extremely displeased the Grand Marshal Brummer, Peter's Great Chamberlain Berkholz, the Countess Roumianzoff, the lady-in-waiting on my mother, and in fact all the rest of the suite, because they were never admitted; and while we laughed through the journey, they were grumbling and wearied."

At the end of three weeks they reached Koselsk, where they awaited the Empress, but another three weeks passed before she joined them; for on the way news reached her that an attempt would be made upon her life, to avoid which her route was considerably altered and lengthened. Another result of this news was that several members of her suite were without any hearing of their cases packed off to Siberia. She reached Koselsk in a bad humour, and rested there for about a fortnight. It was while there that Peter and his future mother-in-law had their first open quarrel, of which Catherine gives an account that shows the characteristics of those concerned in it. While capering round her room one day, the lad

upset the elder lady's casket. "Then my mother got angry and hard words passed between them," says Catherine. "She accused him of having upset the casket on purpose; he denied this and complained of her injustice. Both appealed to me. Knowing my mother's temper I was afraid of getting my ears boxed if I did not side with her, and on the other hand I did not wish to tell a falsehood or displease the Grand Duke, so that I was between two fires. However, I told my mother that I did not think the Duke had done it intentionally, but that while leaping his dress had caught the lid of the casket, which stood on a very small stool. Then my mother took me in hand, for when she was angry she must have some one to find fault with. I was silent and began to cry. The Grand Duke finding that all my mother's anger fell upon me because I had testified in his favour, and seeing me in tears, accused her of injustice and of being mad with passion, to which she retorted by calling him a very ill-behaved little boy. In a word it would have been difficult to go further than they did without actually coming to blows. From this moment the Grand Duke took a dislike to my mother; nor did he ever forget this quarrel. She, on the other hand, retained a grudge against him, and their behaviour to each other tended to produce restraint, distrust, and bitterness. They seldom concealed their feelings when with me, and it was in

vain that I sought to soften them towards each other. I never succeeded beyond the moment, and that but rarely. They had always some sarcasm ready for annoyance, and my situation became every day more painful. I tried to obey the one and please the other ; and indeed at that time the Grand Duke gave me his confidence more completely than he did to any one else ; for he saw that my mother often took me to task when she was unable to fasten upon him. This of course did me no harm in his estimation, for he felt he could count upon me."

To this revelation of tact from a girl of fifteen is added another more remarkable still; for when Peter's Grand Marshal, Count Brummer, complained of the Grand Duke and asked Catherine to use her influence in correcting him, instead of being eager to exert her power or show it as most girls would have been under the circumstances, she promptly answered that "it was impossible for me to do so, and that were I to attempt it I should only render myself as odious to him as his attendants were already."

When the Empress was sufficiently rested, she set out for Kief, where she was enthusiastically received by its inhabitants, and having remained ten days there returned to Moscow. There the whole autumn was spent in various forms of amusements, dramatic representations, masquerades, and balls. At these the nobility vied with each other in the splendour of

their dress, the native costumes of the Cossacks, Hungarians, and Poles making a blaze of Oriental colour. But none could compare on such occasions with the Empress, whose robes were of the richest, most beautiful materials obtainable, and who covered herself with jewels beyond number and above price. The entertainments that at this time pleased her best were masquerades, at which it was her Majesty's pleasure to dress as a man, now as a Cossack soldier, again as a Dutch sailor, or as a colonel of the guards, for in such attire she was able to exhibit a shapely pair of legs that had won flattering mention from two English Ambassadors. One of these, Sir Cyril Wych, anxious to please the Czarina, hinted in his dispatches that the Order of the Garter would, as a decoration for an exquisitely moulded limb, please her above all things; while Lord Hyndford, also desirous to win her favour, in his enthusiasm discarding his usual cipher that might be difficult to read in passing through the Russian post-office, declared in plain English it was hardly possible to conceive "how well the habit of an officer becomes the Empress. I am persuaded," continues this appreciative Minister, "that those who had not known her would have taken her for an officer, were it not for her fine face. And indeed her Majesty has the heart of a man and the beauty of a woman, and is worthy of the admiration of all the world."

So delighted was the Empress with her appearance in male costume, that she gave orders that at the Court masquerades all men should dress as women, and all women as men, while no masks were to be worn. Therefore the men, many of them stalwart soldiers, appeared in whaleboned petticoats, gowns, and head-dresses much against their will, so that instead of entering into the humour of this frolic they were generally in the worst possible humour; nor were the women better pleased at having to wear the Court costume of men, as the younger and leaner among them looked like scraggy boys, while their stout elders, showing thick short legs and obese figures, were far from looking their best.

Among these her Majesty presented a striking and welcome contrast. "The only woman who looked really well and completely a man was the Empress herself," writes the Grand Duchess, speaking of this time. "As she was very tall and somewhat powerful, male attire suited her wonderfully well. She had the handsomest leg I have ever seen with any man, and her foot was admirably proportioned. She danced to perfection, and everything she did had a special grace, equally as to whether she dressed as a man or as a woman. One always felt inclined to be looking at her, and turned away with regret because there was no object that could replace her. At one of these balls I watched her while dancing a minuet.

After she had ended it she came to me. I took the liberty of saying that it was very fortunate for the women she was not a man, and that her portrait alone, painted as she then was, would be enough to turn many a head. She received my compliment in very good part, and an wered me in the same style, saying in the most gracious manner possible that were she a man, it would be to me that she would give the apple. I stooped to kiss her hand for a compliment so unexpected. She embraced me, and every one was curious to know what had passed between us."

A few days later the Grand Duchess was to see another side of the ever-variable temperament of the Czarina. Nothwithstanding the magnificence of her Court festivities and the extravagance of her wardrobe, that numbered fifteen hundred dresses and five hundred pairs of shoes, she was at this time in need of money, principally because she had restored to the clergy eight hundred thousand roubles which her father, Peter the Great, had taken from them. But however profuse her own expenditure might be, she was unwilling that others who were dependent on her should be equally regardless of money. Therefore when sitting in a box opposite to her Majesty at the Moscow theatre, Catherine, ever watchful, saw her speaking angrily and with contracted brows to Lestock. When she had finished he left the Empress, and coming to the Grand Duchess asked her if she had

noticed how her Majesty had spoken to him, and on being told that she had, he stated it was she who had caused the Empress's displeasure. On asking why, she was answered, "Because you are much in debt. She says that wells may be dried up; that when she was a Princess she had no greater allowance than you have, though she had an establishment to provide for; and that she took care not to get into debt because she knew no one that would pay for her."

These words were delivered by Lestock with an air of vexation, to show the Empress how well he executed her orders, and then satisfied with having brought tears into the girl's eyes, he left her. The Grand Duke who had overheard what had been said, gave her to understand he agreed with his aunt, it being his habit, in order to win the Empress's favour, to appear angry with any one who had fallen under her displeasure. On the following morning the Grand Duchess sensibly resolved to put her affairs in order and see how she stood financially. Before leaving for Kief the Czarina had sent her fifteen thousand roubles, but her expenditure had exceeded this sum by two thousand. Different causes, she says, had helped to throw her into this expense. "In the first place, I had arrived in Russia very badly provided for. If I had three or four dresses in the world, it was the very outside; and this at a Court where people change their dresses three or four times a

day. A dozen chemises constituted the whole of my linen, and I had to use my mother's sheets. In the second place I had been told that in Russia people liked presents; and that generosity was the best means of acquiring friends and making one's self agreeable. Thirdly, they had placed about me the most extravagant woman in Russia, the Countess Roumianzoff, who was always surrounded with tradesmen, and constantly showing me a variety of things which she induced me to purchase, and which I often purchased merely to present them to her, as I knew she was eager to have them." Added to these reasons for running into debt were the presents which Peter liked to receive from her, and those which she was obliged to offer to her ill-tempered mother in the hope of soothing her. After all her debts were not large, and would never have gained her the anger of the Czarina if it had not been that those who had been excluded from her carriage on the journey to Kief had taken their petty revenge by misrepresenting her expenditure to her Majesty, an example of the small intrigues, the jealousies, and the malice that were the undercurrents of the Court.

The masquerades, theatrical representations, and other festivities were suddenly interrupted in November, when Peter had a bad attack of measles. Always sickly, he was slow to recover, but when he was quite convalescent the Court prepared to remove from

Moscow to St. Petersburg for the spring and summer. Removal was at this time a very serious and troublesome undertaking, as all the beds, mirrors, tables, chairs, and chests of drawers belonging to the palace vacated were sent on to that about to be occupied; and in their long journey from Moscow and St. Petersburg, or from there to Peterhoff, were frequently cracked, broken, or otherwise dilapidated, and in that condition set up in their ever-changing surroundings.

The Grand Duchess, her mother, and the Grand Duke had reached the town of Chotilovo, about halfway between Moscow and St. Petersburg, when the latter was taken ill one evening. He was put to bed, became feverish during the night, and next morning was declared to be suffering from smallpox. A courier was at once dispatched with the news to the Empress, who had gone on in advance and was then at St. Petersburg; while the Grand Duchess was hurried away by her mother, who dreaded lest the girl should take a disease that was then the scourge of the age. As she was driven through the December night, another sledge was seen to advance rapidly from the opposite direction. This contained the Empress, who was on her way to nurse and remain with Peter. Stopping only for a moment to make inquiries after him, she then hurried on to Chotilovo, while the Grand Duchess went on to St. Petersburg, where she took

up her residence in apartments made ready for her in a house attached to the palace, which was not large enough to accommodate her with rooms.

In the absence of the Court, and while suffering from the ill-humours of her mother, who having quarrelled with every one around her had her meals served in her own room where she might be free from their obnoxious society, the young girl devoted her solitary hours to playing on the harpsichord, to studying the Russian language, and to reading. The books she read had been recommended to her by a member of the Swedish Embassy, Count Gyllenburg, while she was recently at Moscow. It was there she had renewed her acquaintance with the Count, whom she had first met at Hamburg, and who, a clever and perceptive man, had been much attracted by this intelligent child whose mind, as he told her, was very philosophical. On meeting her again he had playfully asked her how it fared with her philosophy in the vortex which encompassed her, and on being told how her days were passed, he said a philosopher of fifteen could not know herself, and that surrounded as she was by so many rocks, she ran great danger of being wrecked, unless her mind was of a superior cast. To strengthen it he therefore suggested a course of study which included *Plutarch's Lives*, the *Life of Cicero*, and Montesquieu's *Fall of the Roman Republic*, all of which she had great difficulty in

finding in St. Petersburg; while later she read the works of Plato; the History of Germany by Père Barre in nine volumes; Bayle's Dictionary in four volumes; the *Esprit des Lois* by Montesquieu; the Annals of Tacitus; the Letters of Madame de Sévigné; the works of Voltaire; the Ecclesiastical History of Baronius in two immense volumes; and as many Russian books as she could get. In her love of reading she proved a singular contrast to those around her, for the Grand Duke seldom opened a book, and the Empress never troubled to read, as she said it was bad for the sight; while the courtiers in general were too ignorant to take any interest in literature.

While the Grand Duchess was occupied in this way she was not without uneasiness lest Peter's illness might end fatally and destroy her chances of sharing his throne in the future. She therefore anxiously awaited the arrival of the messengers from Chotilovo, who continually brought news of his favourable progress, until at last he was declared convalescent and able to travel. A day in the beginning of February 1745 was fixed for his return and that of the Empress, who had remained with him. Knowing the terrible disfigurement which smallpox inflicts on its victims, especially in the early stages of their recovery, the Princess Jeanne prepared her daughter for what she might expect to see; but the latter had quietly resolved

to overlook everything which might strive to come between her and her ambition.

Her imagination, however, had hardly pictured so repulsive an object as her future husband appeared to her. Her own words, simple and direct, best describe what she saw. On hearing that Elizabeth and Peter had arrived, she and her mother hurried to receive her Majesty, "and met her in the great hall between four and five in the evening, when it was nearly dark. Notwithstanding the obscurity, however, I was almost terrified at beholding the Grand Duke. He had grown very much, but his features were scarcely to be recognised; they had all enlarged, the whole face was still swelled, and it was quite evident that he would remain deeply marked. As his hair had been cut off, he wore an immense wig which greatly added to his disfigurement. He came to me and asked if I did not find it difficult to recognise him. I stammered out my congratulations upon his convalescence, but in truth he had grown frightful."

Though Peter was kept in seclusion for some time, as "they were in no hurry to show him in the condition in which the smallpox had left him," his seventeenth birthday was celebrated by a state dinner, the high officials, foreign ambassadors, Court dignitaries and heads of the army dining in a vast apartment at one end of which was her Majesty raised above them on a daïs and seated on a throne. The sole person

admitted to her table was the Grand Duchess, whose recent exhibition of courage or ambition she could not but admire, while pitying her for the fate that awaited her in a husband who was not only hideous but sickly and foolish. She was therefore very gracious to this young girl, who in turn was eager to please her. Their conversation being carried on in the Russian language, Elizabeth praised Catherine's correct pronunciation; assured her that she had grown handsomer since her illness at Moscow; and declared that the letters she had received from her while at Chotilovo written in Russian had greatly pleased her. No doubt it was the Grand Duchess's unwillingness to take from her Majesty's pleasure that prevented her from owning that these letters were really written by her tutor and merely copied by herself.

It was at this time that another member of her family arrived at the Court of Russia. One morning the Princess Jeanne found reason for one of her fits of ill-temper when she received a letter from her younger brother Augustus, expressing a great desire to visit St. Petersburg. To this she at once replied by expressing her dissatisfaction at his wish. Hearing of this, the saturnine Count Bestuzhev, both to mortify her and to forward a political design, without her knowledge obtained from the Empress permission for the Prince to visit Russia. He was coldly received by his sister and by his niece, who resented his presence,

not, as the latter says, that he was a person of any consequence. According to her even his external appearance was against him, for he was small and badly made, he was passionate, without talents and led by his followers, who were themselves quite insignificant and exceedingly stupid.

It was doubtless a proof of his stupidity that he at once ingratiated himself with the Grand Duke by talking to him of the glories of Holstein, a little province that formed a connecting link between Germany and Denmark, which measured from north to south one hundred and forty miles, while its breadth varied from thirty-five to ninety miles, but which Peter preferred to All the Russias. Gaining the good graces of the Grand Duke, and made aware of the estimate in which he was held by the Grand Duchess, Prince Augustus, fearing her influence over her future consort would not be favourable to himself, began with the assistance of some of Peter's suite to instruct his Highness in the manner in which a wife should be treated. She should not, it appeared, ever dare to meddle in his affairs, and if she attempted to open her mouth she was to be ordered to hold her tongue, for it would be a disgraceful thing for a husband to allow himself to be led by his wife like a booby.

The manner in which a report of these instructions was received by the wife who was to be reduced to subservience is best given in her own language, as it

throws a light which no other words could both on her character, and on that of the man to whom she was soon to swear love, honour, and obedience. "Now the Grand Duke," she says, "had about as much discretion as a cannon ball, and when his mind was full of anything, he could not rest until he had unburdened it to the persons he was in the habit of talking with, never for a moment considering to whom it was he spoke. Consequently he used to tell me all these things with the utmost frankness the first time he saw me afterwards. He always fancied that every one was of his opinion, and that nothing could be more reasonable than all this. I took good care not to speak of these things to any one ; but they made me reflect very seriously upon the fate which awaited me. I determined to husband carefully the confidence of the Grand Duke, in order that he might at least consider me as a person of whom he felt sure, and to whom he could confide everything without the least inconvenience to himself ; and in this way I succeeded for a long time. Besides, I treated every one in the best way I could, and studied to gain the friendship, or at least to lessen the enmity, of those whom I in any way suspected of being badly disposed to me. I showed no leaning to any side, nor meddled with anything ; always maintained a serene air, treated every one with great attention, affability, and politeness, and as I was naturally very gay, I saw with pleasure

that from day to day I advanced in the general esteem, and was looked upon as an interesting child, and one by no means wanting in mind. I showed great respect for my mother, a boundless obedience for the Empress, and the most profound deference for the Grand Duke; and I sought with most anxious care to gain the affection of the public. Great or small, I neglected no one, but laid it down to myself as a rule to believe that I stood in need of every one, and so to act in consequence as to obtain the good-will of all; and I succeeded in doing so."

That this clever girl had need of all her tact to steer clear of the mazes of intrigue that presently beset her will be seen. At the present time incessant efforts to win friends, to overcome enemies, and to gain popularity, was needed before she secured her first step, marriage with the Grand Duke; for a false movement might at any moment lead to her being sent back to Zerbst by the impetuous and all-powerful Empress. As the latter was extremely strict in the outward observance of her religious duties the Grand Duchess, by imitating her in this respect, gained her warmest approval. When the first week in Lent came round, Catherine abstained from meat. On Saturday Elizabeth sent her word that it would give her pleasure if she abstained during the second week also, on which the Grand Duchess begged that she might be allowed to abstain during the entire seven weeks of Lent; a

request that greatly delighted her Majesty, and displeased the Grand Duke. For Peter disregarded the laws of the Church he professed to believe in, and feigning illness during this season, kept his room that he might not be expected to fast or pray, and thus be prevented from falling into temptation. He therefore readily yielded to the sin of anger on hearing from the dwarf who was a prominent member of his suite, and by whom he sent word to the Grand Duchess that he would not visit her that day, that she and her maids-of-honour had been found devoutly listening to matins being sung in her ante-room. This put Peter into such bad humour that he was still in a sulk when next he saw his fiancée, who on asking him the cause was severely scolded for her excessive devotion. "I told him," says she, "I did no more than was proper, only what every one else did, and what could not be dispensed with without scandal, but he thought differently. The dispute ended as most disputes do, by leaving each one with his own opinion ; but as his Imperial Highness had no one but me to speak to during Mass, he gradually left off pouting."

At last a day was fixed for their marriage, in which neither of them could expect to find happiness. Quite indifferent to the feelings of his bride-elect, Peter showed how little he cared for her, which if it did not wound her heart, hurt her self-esteem and her vanity, as she confesses, and though too proud to

complain, she shed bitter tears in the privacy of her room. But though she did not expect to find felicity with such a husband, yet she found courage to endure him at the thought of what her union with him might one day bring her; for "in my inmost soul," she writes, "there was a something which never allowed me to doubt for a single moment that sooner or later I should become the sovereign Empress of Russia in my own right."

The marriage was celebrated in the cathedral of St. Petersburg, August 21st, 1745, by the Archbishop of Novgorod. Great pomp attended the ceremony, the nobles vying with each other in the richness of their apparel and the splendour of the carriages that conveyed them to and from the cathedral. The bride, with her beautiful complexion, clear magnetic eyes, and abundant brown hair, looked beautiful in a robe of cloth of silver, blazing with jewels which the Empress had fastened on her head and arms and shoulders; while Peter, not less splendid in full Court suit, looked more weak-kneed and insignificant than ever. Seated at each side of her portly Majesty in an immense gilded coach drawn by eight horses, they passed through squares and streets crowded not only by the citizens, but by those who had travelled for days to see this glorious sight, all of whom cheered, prayed for, and blessed the Czarina, her heir and his bride.

A solemn Mass was celebrated to the superb singing of the Imperial choir ; after which the wedding-rings were sprinkled with holy water, incensed, and blessed ; golden crowns were placed on the heads of bride and bridegroom, their hands joined in symbol of their union, and their vows exchanged. Then to the booming of cannon from the fortress, to the ringing of all the church bells in the city, and to the enthusiastic shouts of the people, the bridal procession returned to the Imperial palace, where a splendid banquet was served, while the populace ate, drank, and made merry at the expense of their sovereign. The festivities lasted for ten days, after which the newly married pair with the Empress went to reside at the Summer Palace. Now that her daughter was married there was no longer any excuse for the Princess Jeanne to remain at the Russian Court, where her arrogance had made her many enemies, where her prying curiosity had vexed the ministers, and where her political intrigues had brought her the dislike of the Empress and an increased watchfulness on the part of Count Alexis Bestuzhev, now Great Chancellor.

Detesting Frederick II., and ever eager to thwart his policy, he had his Majesty's spy carefully and continually watched by those in his pay, whose number included all ranks and both sexes, from the Empress's maids-of-honour to page-boys. Aware from experience that her letters were liable to be opened as they passed

through the Russian post-office, and still persistent in her resolve to play the part of a political intriguer, she hit upon a scheme of getting her correspondence conveyed to the Court of Berlin by a means which she considered would be unsuspected and undiscovered. Therefore one night at a Court ball she smilingly and gaily advanced to Lestock, and flinging a glove at his feet, playfully challenged him to a country dance. Knowing that it contained a letter, that adroit courtier quickly picked it up, and to give a semblance of simplicity to his act, said he accepted the challenge, but that instead of restoring the Princess her glove, he would beg her to give him the other, that he might present them to his wife. Such a request could not be refused, and he was handed the second glove that hid a second letter. Buttoning both inside his waistcoat, he danced with the Princess, and then left the ball-room, intending to forward without delay the correspondence addressed to the King in whose pay he also was.

It is needless to say that Bestuzhev's spies had noted what had passed, and that the correspondence was opened and read. Though it did not contain anything of serious importance, yet its foolish remarks and personal complaints were enough to rouse the anger of the Empress when they were shown her, against the writer, whom she summoned to her presence, soundly rated, and gave her to understand that her visit had better terminate. At that, as the English

Ambassador relates, the Princess fell at her Majesty's feet, and with a flood of tears asked pardon. "The Empress answered that it was now too late to think of that, and that if she had been all along so humble, it would have been better for her." In this dispatch Lord Hyndford adds: "The Empress is not at all pleased with the Grand Duke's behaviour, and she keeps a very watchful strict eye over him, but she has been hitherto very fond of the Grand Duchess, who seems to be a good creature."

The Princess of Zerbst left Russia in September 1745, not without receiving handsome presents from the generous Empress. Though she had been severe with her daughter, and had resented the precedence the latter was obliged to take as Grand Duchess, yet in parting from her the Princess showed every sign of affection and regret. Notwithstanding the want of sympathy between them, the young bride must have felt the loss of her mother, for she was now a veritable state prisoner, under the surveillance of Madame Krause, who nominally acted as her head lady's-maid, and who terrorised all the other women under her; so that on the Grand Duchess approaching one of them to speak to her as usual, that frightened person called out, "In God's name do not come near me: we have been forbidden to whisper to you." Solitary and weary, Catherine yawned and sighed, for she had no one with whom to interchange an idea, her

beloved spouse not troubling his weak head about her, but preferring to her company that of his valets, with whom he played at soldiers, exercising them in his room, or changing his uniform twenty times a day.

Within a fortnight of his marriage he had confided to his wife that he was in love with Mademoiselle Carr, one of her Imperial Majesty's maids-of-honour; and declared to his Chamberlain, Count Devier, that there was no comparison between her and the Grand Duchess. This candid opinion given in the presence of the latter, was warmly contradicted by the courtier, with whom Peter became very angry. It was no wonder that Catherine came to the conclusion that to have any affection for such a husband would be the best way to secure her own unhappiness. "I might die of jealousy without benefit to any one," she says philosophically enough, adding, "I endeavoured therefore to master my feelings so as not to be jealous of a man who did not love me. Had he wished to be loved, I should have found no difficulty in loving him. I was naturally well disposed, and accustomed to fulfil my duties; but then, too, I should have required a husband who had common sense, which this one had not."

A striking proof of his want of common sense or discretion was given by Peter shortly after his marriage. To while away the tedious time not spent in drilling, promoting, and degrading his servants, he set up a

marionette theatre in his room. One of the doors in this, which led into her Majesty's apartments, was fastened up. On a certain day when his Imperial Highness was preparing for a performance of his puppets, he heard voices in the adjoining apartment, and full of curiosity took a gimlet and quietly bored holes in the door, so that he might see what was going on there. He was gratified by a sight of the Empress, with her chief favourite, Count Alexis Razumovsky, "in a brocaded dressing-gown," and about a dozen others who enjoyed the confidence of her Majesty, seated at dinner round a table that by mechanical contrivance could be raised and lowered, cleared and served, so as to dispense with servants whose presence might prove inconvenient. Delighted by his discovery, Peter called his servants to peep through the holes, and then eager for a larger audience to share the fun, he rushed into his wife's rooms and invited her and her maids to see something which he told them they had never seen before.

"He did not tell us what it was, doubtless to give us an agreeable surprise," says the Grand Duchess. "As I did not hurry myself sufficiently to gratify his impatience, he led away Madame Krause and my women. I arrived last and found them stationed in front of this door, where he had placed benches, chairs, and stools, for the accommodation of the spectators, as he said. On entering I asked what all this was about.

He ran to meet me and told me what the case was. I was terrified and indignant at his rashness, and told him I would neither look nor have anything to do with this impropriety, which would certainly bring him into trouble if his aunt should come to hear of it, and this she could not well help doing, seeing that there were at least twenty persons in his secret. All who had allowed themselves to look through the door, finding that I would not do the same, began to file off one after the other. The Grand Duke himself became ashamed of what he had done, and recommenced working at his theatre. I returned to my room."

It was not until the following Sunday that the sequel to this scene was enacted. The Grand Duchess had just returned from Mass, for which she had been rather late, and was about to take off her Court dress, when the Empress, flushed and angry, entered the room with a determined and imperious air. The frightened Catherine hurried to kiss her hand, and was kissed in turn. Then looking round and not seeing the Grand Duke, her Majesty desired him to be sent for. While waiting for him, she scolded the Grand Duchess for being late at Mass, and preferring to adorn herself rather than to attend the service of God. At the time of the Empress Anna, she said, she herself, though not living at Court but in a house at some distance from the palace, had never failed in such a duty, but had often got up by candle-light that she might be

in time for Mass. She then sent for Catherine's hair-dresser, and told him that if in future he were so slow in dressing the Grand Duchess's hair, he would be dismissed.

By this time Peter, little suspecting what awaited him carelessly sauntered into the room, his Court dress just removed giving place to a dressing-gown, his nightcap in his hand. Turning on him, the Empress asked how he had dared to pierce holes in the door of her private apartment. He seemed to have forgotten, she said, all that he owed her, and was an ungrateful person. She reminded him that Peter the Great had an ungrateful son whom he had punished, and that the Empress Anna had sent to the fortress those who were wanting in respect to the anointed of the Lord. As for him he was but a little boy, but she would teach him how to behave. At that he began to get angry and would have answered, but she commanded him to be silent, and became so excited that her fury knew no bounds, as was usually the case when she got into a passion. "She loaded him with insults and said all sorts of shocking things, treating him with as much contempt as anger," as Catherine relates in her Memoirs.

Both of them were thunderstruck, and though the Imperial wrath was not aimed at her, tears came into her eyes, seeing which the Empress told her that what she said to the Grand Duke did not apply to her, as

she had nothing to do with his abominable behaviour in looking through the door. Then with a flushed face and flashing eyes she left these frightened children. "She was like a fury and did not know what she said," Peter whispered in a half-sheepish, half-comical manner; to which his consort could only reply, "She was dreadfully angry." When presently she was alone, the spy Madame Krause coming to her room, remarked that her Majesty had acted like a true mother. "I saw she wished to make me talk, and therefore I said nothing," says the astute Catherine. Madame Krause then went on to say that when a mother was angry with her children she scolded them and there the matter ended, and that they ought to have said to the Empress, "I beg your pardon, madame," which would have appeased her. The Grand Duchess said that she was so astounded and petrified by her Majesty's anger that she could only listen and be silent; on which her hearer left to make a report.

From the day when she had appointed Peter as her successor, the Empress had regarded him as a rival. Not allowed to take part in state councils, to share the confidence of ministers, or to have any insight into the government of the empire, he was treated as a child; not because his natural incapacity rendered him unfit for business, but rather lest, gaining popularity and power, he might endeavour to repeat certain incidents in the history of Russia, and by raising an

insurrection send the present sovereign to Siberia and place himself upon her throne. Weak and harmless as Peter was, there were always dark possibilities to be faced by the supreme sovereign of All the Russias ; and because of this, Count Alexis Bestuzhev, Grand Chancellor and arch-intriguer, had no difficulty in gaining her Majesty's consent to have spies placed round the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess ; the former of whom he knew detested him, and whom he disliked because of his partisanship to Frederick II. ; while he distrusted the latter, whose cleverness he was as quick to recognise as he was determined to frustrate it. With Elizabeth's consent he also drew up a rigid course of instructions to be observed by those who were to surround the young couple, which was to regulate their conduct to the minutest detail, to deprive them of all enjoyments and amusements, and that went so far as to forbid Peter from playing at soldiers or holding any intercourse with his beloved marionettes.

Therefore the members of the suite that had at first been given them were gradually dismissed. Though such dismissals were considered at Court as disgraces, yet those might consider themselves fortunate who were not banished ; a fate which awaited Mademoiselle Joukoff, one of the Grand Duchess's maids-of-honour, who was sent to Astracan lest her Imperial Highness might "become too much attached to a person who so little deserved" her favour ; or that overtook the

three Czernicheffs, all tall handsome men, who were the special confidants of Peter, and on one of whom Catherine was believed to look with favour; but all of whom suddenly disappeared, having been as was afterwards accidentally learned, placed under arrest at Ribatchia, a private residence of the Empress, from which, without being charged with any offence, they were transferred to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Those dismissed had their places filled by the spies of Count Alexis Bestuzhev, whose daily habit it was to write his instructions on small pieces of paper, in terms which would be understood only by those for whom they were intended, and then concealing these scraps in the double bottom of his snuff-box, distribute them under the pretence of giving a pinch of snuff to those for whom they were intended. But the hardest blow in this direction was dealt their Imperial Highnesses when the office of Controller of their Household was given to Madame Choglokova, who was related to the Empress, and was a trusted friend of Count Alexis Bestuzhev. More than this, she was known to be a malicious, capricious, selfish, and dangerous woman; while her husband was an arrogant and brutal fool, feared by every one, but most of all by his wife, whose worship was proportionate to her terror of him. Regarded by the whole Court with suspicion and dread, it was no wonder that

Catherine, made melancholy by the loss of her friends, treated as a state prisoner, and left more than usually alone on account of a passing fancy of Peter's for a Madame Cederaparre, became utterly miserable on hearing of the appointment of her jailer.

One day when the Empress found her in tears, her Majesty said with some displeasure that young women who did not love their husbands were always crying, that Peter had not been forced upon her, and that as she was married there was no use in lamenting it. The poor Grand Duchess begged her Majesty's pardon, and then by way of remedying her grief, she was bled and put to bed, where she wept the whole day. The next evening when she saw her husband he, eager as usual to confide in her, made her acquainted with the success of his advances to Madame Cederaparre, and also let her know he was told that Madame Choglokova had been appointed to watch her because she did not love him, and lest she might love some one else. "But I cannot understand how they expected to increase my attachment for him by giving me that woman, and so I told him," writes Catherine. "As to placing her with me as an Argus, that was a different matter. But if this was their object, they ought to have chosen some one less stupid; and besides it was not necessary for this purpose to be spiteful and malevolent. Madame Choglokova was thought to be extremely virtuous because she loved her husband to

adoration. She had married him for love. So excellent an example placed before me would perhaps persuade me to imitate it. We shall see how far the experiment was successful "—with which hint of future revelations the curtain may fall on the first months of her married life.

CHAPTER III

Elizabeth's brilliant Court—Her love of ease and dislike to business—Alexis Razumovsky, the shepherd-boy with the beautiful voice—His fascination for the Empress—His brother Cyril comes to Court—The Grand Duchess is forbidden to mourn for her father—How she received and smuggled a letter—Life at the Grand Duke's country house—He plays the violin to unwilling hearers—The Empress makes a pilgrimage—The misery of travelling—Stringent treatment of their Imperial Highnesses—The Grand Duke and his dogs—He plays with toys—His refusal to take a bath—Falls in love with a little hunchback—The downfall of Count Lestock—The Empress selects a new favourite—The Great Chancellor's selection of a rival—The Grand Duchess's flirtations—Sergius Soltikoff and Leon Narichkine—How a dragon is hoodwinked—Her Imperial Highness goes a-hunting and listens to a lover—Suspicions are aroused—The Grand Duke whispers—The Grand Duchess makes friends with her arch-enemy—An heir to the Crown is required—Extraordinary discourse of Madame Choglokova—The Imperial palace takes fire—The loss of four thousand gowns—New appointments at Court—The man with the twitching face—The Grand Duchess fears the removal of her lover.

THE Court by which the Grand Duchess was surrounded was at once brilliant, licentious, and extravagant, a network of intrigue, the scene of adventure; with equal possibilities of vast power and wealth, or of disgrace, exile, or death for those who took prominent parts in its social or political move-

ments. Elizabeth, the central figure around whom moved a throng of lovers, politicians, adventurers, sycophants, and schemers, was in herself a remarkable and many-sided woman. As already stated, she could be deeply religious for days, only to relapse into notorious profligacy; she could be gentle and affectionate, and fiendishly cruel. Loving pomp and magnificence, she sometimes dressed in gorgeous splendour, covered herself with matchless jewels, and appeared before her subjects in a blaze of glory; while there were times when, wrapped in an old dressing-gown, she remained shut up in her own apartments, passing her time in listening to the gossip of her ladies-in-waiting.

Loving ease above all things, she troubled herself but little regarding the condition of her subjects; and so long as the dignity of her vast empire was not threatened or impugned, she was so indifferent to its affairs, and so indolent, that state papers requiring her signature, or social affairs needing her decision, remained unsigned and unheeded for several months before her attention was reluctantly given to them. Her dislike to order or regularity was extended to her personal habits, for she had no fixed hours for meals, for exercise, for rising or retiring, and occasionally preferred to sleep on a sofa or mattress in one or other of the rooms where she happened to be rather than trouble to retire to bed. Though exacting in

having her will carried out, yet it was difficult for her to come to a decision. When, however, she chose to exert it, she had a sharp, quick, and incisive intelligence.

At this time and for some years previously Elizabeth had been ruled through her affections by Alexis Razumovsky. As a shepherd-boy he had daily led his father's flocks to graze on the mountains of the Ukarin, or Little Russia, as it is sometimes called. One of the Cossack race, the same in origin as the Poles, young Alexis inherited the gifts and tastes common to both, a love of music and a sweet voice. These led to his being included in the choir of his village church, where his singing attracted the attention of a passing courtier, Colonel Wischnowski, who on asking to see him at the conclusion of the Mass, had presented to him an extremely handsome lad whose manners were naturally refined and gentle.

As his parents were readily persuaded to part with him in the hope that he might make his fortune in the capital, he left in the suite of this noble, who taking him to St. Petersburg, had his voice carefully trained. Alexis then became a member of the Imperial choir, where Elizabeth heard him, and was at once attracted by his melodious voice. On seeing so handsome a youth his attraction for her deepened, and without loss of time he received an appointment in her household as a musician, for he also played to

After a picture by H. Benner.

THE EMPRESS ELIZABETH.

perfection on the lute. In a little while he succeeded as her lover, a guardsman who had been sent to Siberia by the Empress Anna, after first having had his tongue cut out. So great was the affection that Elizabeth had for Alexis Razumovsky, whose noble presence, beautiful voice, and dignified manners fascinated her, that it was believed she had privately married him. Of this, however, no evidence has been found. If indeed he were her husband, then he has left an example of philosophic tolerance which has rarely been excelled even in the present day.

On gaining the throne, Elizabeth loaded him with favours. He was appointed Chamberlain, had the title of Count conferred on him, was invested with the Order of St. Andrew, was made a field-marshal and master of the hounds, while palaces and properties were also given him. Like his Imperial mistress, he delighted in splendour. Among all the courtiers there was none whose dress was richer, whose lace was finer, whose jewels—most of them gifts of her Majesty—were more splendid, while his equipages were magnificent, and nothing could exceed in brilliancy the entertainments he delighted to give the Empress and her courtiers. But though he had risen from a shepherd-lad to being a man of the highest importance in all Russia, he was not only free from arrogance and pride, but he retained his graciousness of manner, his kindness of heart, and his natural tact that won

him the friendship of all. Though excessive suavity is not always combined with common sense, both qualities met in Alexis Razumovsky, who not only refrained from using his supreme influence in affairs of state, but absolutely declined to meddle in politics. In this way he secured the confidence of the jealous and ambitious Bestuzhev, and was regarded as a friend by Peter and by Catherine.

Generous to all, he remembered his peasant parents, whom he raised to comfort and independence the moment it was in his power, while his younger brother Cyril, who it was said had journeyed to the capital carrying on his back the lute which had gained him food and lodging on the way, was sent by him to be educated in France and Germany. From these countries Cyril came back with polished manners, a knowledge of art, love of literature, and an acquaintance with foreign lands, that must have made him conspicuous among the Russian nobles who despised him for his origin while not daring to show their pride to the brother of the favourite. It was in the early months of Catherine's married life that he returned to St. Petersburg, where he was graciously welcomed by the Empress, who bestowed many favours on him, among others creating him a Count, making him Grand Hetman of the Cossacks, and though somewhat against his inclination, marrying him to her cousin Ekaterina Ivanovna Naruishkina, a very considerable heiress.

The statement as to his unwillingness to marry the lady who became his wife is made by the Grand Duchess, who tells that while she was staying at a small country house at Rajova, about eleven versts from Moscow, she was continually visited throughout the summer by Count Cyril, who rode over from his country seat at Pokrovskoe that he might dine and sup with her and her husband; after which he rode back again, his journey covering from forty to fifty versts in all. When years later she asked him what had induced him to share the dulness of their lives while his own house was filled with the best company from Moscow, he had answered it was love; and on being further questioned as to whom he could find at their house to love, he had confessed that it was herself, on which, much surprised but in no way indignant, she had burst out laughing.

Under the severe governorship of Madame Choglokova and her stupid and arrogant husband, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess led a restricted and harassed life. The most harmless and simplest speech made by the latter was generally met by the comment, "Such a remark would displease her Majesty" or "Such a thing would not be approved of by her Majesty," until existence became a burden. Catherine was also told that any communication she desired to make to the Empress in future must pass through Madame Choglokova. Later on her Imperial Highness was

informed one morning that her father was dead, on which, as she had deep affection for him, she gave way to grief. But at the end of a week she was told that her Majesty ordered her to leave off crying, as "it was not suitable for a Grand Duchess to mourn for a longer period a father who had not been a king." That news of this bereavement did not come direct from her mother is probably due to the fact that the Princess Jeanne's letters were opened, read, and destroyed as they passed through the Russian post-office. The Princess, suspecting this, had recourse to another means of communicating with her daughter.

It therefore happened that when the Chevalier Sacromose visited the Russian Court and was presented to the Grand Duchess, he slipped a note into her palm as he raised her hand to his lips, whispering at the same time that it was from the Princess Jeanne. Though almost stupefied with terror lest this act had been seen by the Choglokovs, she managed to slip it into her glove. On gaining the solitude of her own room, she read and found it was a letter from her mother, who was anxious on account of her long silence, the cause of which she wanted to know, as also as to how she was situated; and who stated that an answer could be returned through an Italian musician who played at the concerts which the Grand Duke was then allowed to hold. In answer Catherine told her mother she had been forbidden to write to any one

under the pretext that it did not become a Russian Grand Duchess to write any letters save such as were composed at the Office for Foreign Affairs, which she was never to dictate, as the ministers knew better than she did what it was proper for her to say, and to which she was merely to attach her signature. This letter she rolled up and then waited her chance of dispatching it. At the next concert given by Peter, she drew near to the orchestra, and paused a second behind the chair of the Italian musician, who immediately took out his handkerchief, leaving wide open his pocket, into which she dropped her letter unseen. In this way she was able to communicate with her mother several times while the Chevalier Sacromose remained in St. Petersburg.

During the first year of his married life, the Grand Duke was presented by the Empress with a house named Oranienbaum, within forty versts from St. Petersburg. Built on a height, it was charmingly situated, overlooking as it did the Gulf of Finland and the distant fortress of Cronstadt. Here, where the young couple were allowed to remain for weeks at a time, always under the watchful eyes of the Choglokovs, Peter was permitted once more to play at soldiers, in the belief that it would keep him occupied, and prevent him from interesting himself in the affairs of the empire. No sooner therefore did he reach Oranienbaum than the gentlemen of the bedchamber,

the officers of his Court, the chamberlains, adjutants, servants, huntsmen, stablemen, and gardeners were obliged to shoulder a musket, to submit to be drilled all day long, and in turn to mount guard over the corridor. In the evening the gentlemen of the household were expected to dance, but as they were tired and harassed after all their military exercises, they were usually in very bad humour. Occasionally the future sovereign varied his occupation by training a pack of hounds, and in the evening by scraping on his violin. "He did not know a note," writes his wife, "but he had a good ear, and made the beauty of music consist in the force and violence with which he drew forth the tones of his instrument. Those who had to listen to him, however, would often have been glad to stop their ears had they dared, for his music grated on them dreadfully."

Their Imperial Highnesses were never allowed to remain long apart from her Majesty; not that when near her they were permitted to enjoy her company, or even to see her constantly; but it pleased the sovereign that they should form part of her suite. They were therefore continually moving about from St. Petersburg to Moscow, from Tsarskoe Selo to Sophine, from one country palace to another, from monasteries to convents. The most tedious and trying of such journeys were those undertaken by the Empress to some famous shrine or sanctuary; especially

when, having in a moment of repentance vowed to make the pilgrimage on foot, she set out to fulfil her promise. This was kept in the letter if not in the spirit, for having undertaken to walk sixty versts—as when she went from Moscow to the Troitsa Monastery—she went on foot for three or four versts, and then getting into the carriage that followed her, rested a couple of days before resuming her pilgrimage at the exact spot where it had been discontinued, and walking four versts more, when she again rested. In this way a whole summer was sometimes passed, not only by her Majesty, but by the Court which was obliged to follow her.

The inconvenience and misery attending travelling in those days seems incredible in ours. The post-houses at which the Court halted to rest in its long journeys were invariably too small to accommodate one-half its number, the remaining half being obliged to find shelter in tents brought for the purpose. Life in these was sometimes carried on under difficulties. "I remember that on one occasion," writes the Grand Duchess in speaking of these halts, "I dressed near the oven where the bread had just been baked; and that at another time, when I entered the tent where my bed was placed, there was water in it up to the ankle." On another journey, when by some mistake the provisions and horses intended for their Imperial Highnesses were taken by the Empress's suite, which

had gone in advance, they remained for twenty-four hours without food, as there was none to be had in the wild country around them. At the end of that time a sturgeon was caught, and when roasted over a wood fire was thought delicious by hungry people.

The want of decent accommodation in the Imperial palaces was hardly less irksome than that which was experienced in the travelling tents. At Moscow, for instance, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess were given a wing built of wood in the Imperial palace, which was so damp that water ran down the wainscoting. In all it had but five or six rooms, in one of which Catherine's maids and ladies of the bedchamber, together with their servants, numbering seventeen in all, were obliged to sleep ; and that having no ingress or egress but by her bedroom, they were continually obliged to pass and repass through it. The inconvenience of this arrangement was all the greater because she was ill at the time, and the screens she had placed in her room were of little use, as the doors were being continually opened and shut, so that people might come and go as in a thoroughfare. Presently when the Empress visited the invalid, she decided to remedy this by having a partition made which took from the overcrowded bedroom one of its windows, under which a flight of steps was placed leading to the street, so that when the ladies of the bedchamber or their servants

wished to gain another part of the palace, they did so by walking along the street. "I cannot tell," says the Grand Duchess, "how it was that these seventeen women thus huddled up and crowded together did not catch a putrid fever; and all this, too, close to my bedroom, which in consequence was so filled with vermin of every kind that I could not sleep."

The existence led by the Imperial state prisoners was far from enviable. On returning early in the autumn from Moscow to the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, stringent orders were issued by the Empress, through Choglokov, that no one should enter their apartments without the express permission of himself or his wife; the ladies and gentlemen of their household being forbidden under pain of instant dismissal to pass the threshold, or to speak to them or their servants except in a loud voice; while all were prohibited from communicating to their Imperial Highnesses any news as to what occurred in the city or the Court. "The Grand Duke and myself," says Catherine, "thus compelled to sit looking at each other, murmured and secretly interchanged thoughts relative to this species of imprisonment which neither of us had deserved. To procure for himself more amusement during the winter, the Grand Duke had five or six hounds brought from the country, and placed them behind a wooden partition which separated

the alcove of my bedroom from a large vestibule behind our apartments. As the alcove was separated only by boards, the odour of the kennel penetrated into it; and in the midst of this disgusting smell we both slept. When I complained to him of the inconvenience, he told me it was impossible to help it. The kennel being a great secret, I put up with this nuisance rather than betray his Imperial Highness."

To provide himself with further amusement he made all his own servants and those of his wife dress in masquerade and dance in her bedroom to the scraping of his violin; while she, under various pretexts of headache or lassitude, lay down on a couch tired to death of this noise and romping which gave him infinite amusement. She was not always so fortunate in being able to escape from his diversions, for presently he took it into his head to play cards with her. When she won he got angry, and when she lost he demanded payment immediately. As he had no money, he began to fix certain values on various articles of his wardrobe, his nightcap for instance being priced at ten thousand roubles, but when this was won he became furious and sulked for days.

It was no wonder that some of their suite, including the nearest relatives of their jailers, the Choglokovs, took compassion on them, and strove to lessen the rigour of their imprisonment. "Generally speaking," says the Grand Duchess, "all the persons who had

been placed about me by an ill-will the most unequivocal began in a short time to take an involuntary interest in me; and when they were not interfered with or stimulated anew, they used to act against the principles of their employers, and yield to the impulse which attracted them towards me, or rather to the interest with which I inspired them. They never found me sulky or peevish, but always ready to meet the slightest advance on their part." As a testimony to her magnetic power, odd scraps of news were whispered to her; such as that Prince Repnin, who had been one of those removed from the service of the Grand Duke, had died of grief at what he considered his disgrace; or how Alexis Razumovsky, having a bad attack of gout, was being devotedly attended by the Empress; trifles in themselves but that seemed important to those cut off from all information.

Even Madame Krause, herself a spy, sometimes hoodwinked the hated Choglokovs so far as to bring books and news to the Grand Duchess; while she won the favour of the Grand Duke by supplying him with the puppets and toys that he loved. During the day these were safely hidden under his bed from the prying eyes of the Choglokovs, but immediately his supper was over he became impatient to retire. Then no sooner were he and his wife in bed, than Madame Krause, already in the room, locked the door, and the Grand Duke played with his puppets until one or

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two in the morning, Madame Krause and the Grand Duchess being obliged to share in his amusement. "I often laughed, but more frequently felt annoyed and even inconvenienced," says the latter, "the whole bed being covered and filled with playthings, some of which were rather heavy. I do not know whether Madame Choglokova came to hear of these nocturnal amusements, but one night about twelve o'clock she knocked at the door of our bedroom. We did not open it immediately, as the Grand Duke, myself, and Madame Krause were scrambling with all our might to gather up and conceal the toys; for this purpose the coverlid of the bed answered very well, as we crammed them all under it. This done, we opened the door. She complained dreadfully of having been kept waiting, and told us that the Empress would be very angry when she learnt that we were not asleep at that hour. She then sulkily departed without having made any further discovery. As soon as she was gone the Grand Duke resumed his amusements until he became sleepy." Shortly afterwards Madame Krause was dismissed, and her place taken by Madame Vladislava.

Throughout the whole of the Empress's reign the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess never dared to go out into the city or leave the palace without first sending to ask her permission. But though not allowed unless on certain public occasions to see her

Majesty who was under the same roof with them, their Imperial Highnesses continually received orders from her as to when they were to drive out, when they were to attend their religious duties, or to appear at balls, drawing-rooms, or state ceremonies. In all of these she was obeyed, not only by the Grand Duchess, who was always anxious to win her Majesty's favour, but by Peter; that is, in all but one, for there came a day when a certain command of hers seemed more than he could bear. This was an order conveyed by Madame Choglokova that he should take a bath. As above all other things he abhorred a bath, he immediately and defiantly declared that he would do nothing of the kind. Aghast at his audacity, he was told that his refusal was an act of disobedience to her Imperial Majesty, but he replied that he ought not to be asked to do what was so repugnant to his nature, that it was unsuitable to his constitution, and that it would certainly kill him, if he were compelled to take a bath. To that Madame Choglokova sternly answered that the Empress would know how to punish his disobedience; on which in a burst of passion he called out, "I should like to see what she can do. I am not a child." He was then told that he would be sent to the fortress, frightened at which he began to cry bitterly without ceasing to abuse Madame Choglokova, who haughtily quitted the room threatening that she would repeat all that had passed to her Majesty.

Probably the latter was moved by his fears, for nothing more was said about the bath, and he was allowed to go unwashed. It was no wonder his suffering wife says that "his Imperial Highness was insupportable during summer."

At other seasons of the year his presence was less intolerable, and at this time there was one of the ladies of the Court who suffered his harmless attentions. It happened that while the Empress was staying at Tsarskoe Selo, their Imperial Highnesses found themselves more solitary than ever; for the nobles who were forced to live in the capital, always took advantage of the absence of the Court to leave it, and indeed were so reluctant to return, that when her Majesty came back after a prolonged absence at Moscow, it took six months or more for St. Petersburg—whose streets had meantime become grass-grown—to resume the appearance it had previous to her departure. As the Choglokovs felt the dulness as keenly as their state prisoners, they introduced to the latter a few of the courtiers that had been left behind, to play cards. Among these was the Princess of Courland, daughter of Biren, whom the Empress Anna had loved, whom her niece had banished, and whom Elizabeth had recalled from Siberia. This Princess, whose years were approaching the thirties, was little, ugly, and deformed, but had much intelligence and a bright manner. But her mental attractions were as nothing in the eyes of

the Grand Duke, in comparison to the fact that she was German, and spoke the language of that country to him. He therefore sat beside her, told her anecdotes of his soldiers, wooden and human, showed her any new grenadier's cap or shoulder belt he got hold of, sent her wine and his favourite dishes from his table, and in fact paid her such attentions as he was capable of.

This was continued for months, not only while their Imperial Highnesses were at St. Petersburg, but when they were allowed by the Empress to stay at Tsarskoe Selo during her absence from there, and while she stayed at Gostilitza, the residence of the favourite, Count Alexis Razumovsky. Here his attentions were so marked and so public, that seeing herself slighted for a little hunchback, his wife's vanity was wounded. One evening in particular when Madame Vladislava declared it was disgusting to see this deformed creature preferred to the Grand Duchess, the latter rose from the table with tears in her eyes and went to bed. What follows illustrates the hardships of her life at this time ; hardships that serve as some excuse for the intrigues which she was soon to begin. "Scarcely was I asleep," says she, "when the Grand Duke also came to bed. As he was tipsy and knew not what he was doing, he spoke to me for the purpose of expatiating on the eminent qualities of his favourite. To check his garrulity as soon as possible, I pretended to

be fast asleep. He spoke still louder in order to wake me, but finding that I still slept, he gave me two or three rather hard blows in the side with his fist ; then growling at the heaviness of my slumbers, he turned on his side and dropped asleep himself. I wept long and bitterly that night, as well on account of the matter itself, and the blows he had given me, as on that of my general situation, which was in all respects as disagreeable as it was wearisome."

For all that she seems to have harboured no malice against her husband, and was ready to help him out of a scrape a few days later, and as it happened in the last week of Lent. Always restless, he was one day amusing himself in his own room by walking up and down cracking an immense coachman's whip which he had just had made for himself. The fun of his action consisted in seeing his valets jump from one corner to another out of his reach, while he laughed at their nimbleness, at their fears of getting slashed, and at their cries when the lash fell upon them. But while capering about in this way, he managed to give himself a blow on the left side of his face that was severe enough to make blood flow. At this he was terrified lest at the approaching Easter-time the Empress would notice the state of his face, and on learning its cause scold him for his childishness and take his whip from him. He therefore, as was usual with him when in trouble, ran to his wife who after a few minutes

thought told him to keep his room, so that no one should know of his accident until she came to him. Presently she secured a pomade made out of white lead, and put it over his cheek, when its discoloration was not perceptible. On Maundy Thursday they both received the Sacrament in the Imperial chapel in company with the Empress, who did not notice the bruise ; but when they had retired to their own places, where the light fell upon them, Choglokov came forward and told the Grand Duke to wipe his cheek, on which there was some pomade. At that the Grand Duchess quickly said, "And I who am your wife, forbid your doing so." Taking his cue from her, Peter had the wit to say, "See how these women treat us ; we dare not even wipe our faces if they do not like it." Choglokov then went away murmuring that this was indeed a woman's caprice, and the situation was saved.

Meantime certain events of interest were taking place at Elizabeth's Court. Early in the winter of 1748, Count Armand Lestock was married to Mademoiselle Mengden, a maid-of-honour to her Majesty, who with the whole Court attended the brilliant ceremony of their union. Later she paid the bride and bridegroom the special honour of visiting them at their own house. Outside the throng of those who lauded and congratulated the exultant Lestock was one sinister figure, that of the Great Chancellor

Bestuzhev, whose eyes must have twinkled with malice as knowing what was soon to come, he watched this man whom he knew was eager to overthrow his power in the interests of Frederick of Prussia. Lestock himself, though as well aware as any man in the empire of the wiles of Bestuzhev and the practices of the Russian post-office, seemed unconscious of his peril until it was close upon him; as were those around him, so swiftly and silently did his opponent act. But one evening the Grand Duchess, admitted to the apartments of the Empress, was interestedly watching the courtiers at their favourite amusement of gambling, when seeing the Count she advanced to speak to him. As she approached he said in a low warning tone, "Do not come near me, I am a suspected man." Believing that he was jesting she asked him what he meant, to which he replied, "I tell you quite seriously not to come near me, because I am a suspected man whom people must shun." Seeing that his face was flushed and excited, she came to the conclusion that he had been drinking, but two days later, on November 13th, she was startled to hear that he had been arrested.

Lestock, once all-powerful with the Empress whom he had helped to place on the throne, and smiled upon by subservient courtiers, had been roused at night in his own house, and with his wife conveyed by a company of the guards to the fortress as a state criminal. The principal charges against him were

that he had accepted a thousand roubles from the King of Prussia to support his policy ; and that he had poisoned a man named Oettinger, who could have given damning evidence against him. From the beginning he must have regarded himself as lost, for he strove to end life by starvation, and for the first eleven days of his imprisonment nourishment had to be forced down his throat that he might live, and under torture, if not voluntarily, confess his misdeeds and the names of his accomplices. But though subjected to dreadful sufferings he kept resolutely silent, save to denounce Bestuzhev. He was confined for four years in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, and then banished to a distant part of Siberia, where he and his wife, both of whom often wanted the necessaries of life, dragged out a miserable existence until the death of Elizabeth.

The sudden downfall of Lestock created a sensation at Court, which had hardly subsided when an event of deeper interest sent the courtiers whispering, smiling, and speculating. Among her Majesty's pages there was at this time a handsome and gracious youth named Ivan Ivanovitch Schouvaloff, who was above the average in intelligence, something of a student, and remarkable for the elegance of his dress. Upon him Elizabeth, who had now passed her fortieth birthday, cast admiring eyes, so that it was not a surprise to those in the inner circle when he was appointed a gentleman of the bedchamber, and given apartments

in the palace. For awhile all waited in breathless expectancy to see if Count Alexis Razumovsky would be dismissed, or voluntarily retire ; while the Great Chancellor, who had in him a friend and supporter, was filled with alarm lest he might find in this younger man an opponent eager to show his influence. Eventually the Court was somewhat disappointed to see that Razumovsky remained, and was quite content to share her Majesty's favour with his rival, who became his intimate friend. Nor did this amiable man seemed moved to jealousy when Ivan Ivanovitch, almost without effort, began to exercise his influence over the Czarina ; an early proof of which was that his uncles Alexander and Peter, who had formerly been gentlemen of the household to Elizabeth, and had on her coming to the throne been made colonels in the guards, were promoted to higher offices.

The Great Chancellor, however, always cynical and wary, secretly distrusted the young favourite, as Ivan Ivanovitch was generally called, and determined to oust him from his high place in the Empress's favour by introducing a rival. It was not however easy to discover one whose youthful comeliness could compete with that of Ivan Ivanovitch, but presently such was found in the person of Nitika Beketoff, a lad between eighteen and nineteen, exceedingly handsome and of the most winning personality. To introduce him to the notice of her Imperial Majesty was a matter of less

difficulty. The Senator and Chief of the Corps of Cadets had for his own amusement organised them into an amateur dramatic society for the performance of the plays of Soumarokoff and Voltaire. These representations soon became the fashion, and the young man who took the principal parts, Nitika Beketoff, was greatly praised, not only for his talents as an actor, but for his gracious appearance. The plays had been acted at St. Petersburg during the Empress's absence from the capital, but on her return she was readily induced to order them to be produced at Court ; when her interest in them became at once apparent, a fact that surprised those who knew she had little taste for the drama, but which seemed greatly to please Count Alexis Bestuzhev.

The theatre, at first set up in one of the halls of the Winter Palace, was soon transferred to the apartments of the Czarina, where she was interested enough to witness the rehearsals and to employ herself in selecting the wardrobe. Though magnificent dresses were ordered for all the actors, it soon became noticed that Nitika Beketoff's costumes were the most superb. Later it was seen that it was not only on the stage but in public that he wore priceless lace, diamond shoe buckles such as his income could not afford, and rings that were worth a king's ransom. These the prying courtiers soon discovered were supplied to him by a former lady's-maid of the

Empress ; but as she was far from rich, their cynical suspicions led them to think the money that bought them did not come out of her own pocket. Such suspicions were confirmed when suddenly Nitika Beketoff left the Corps of Cadets to become the adjutant of Count Alexis Razumovsky, the most accommodating of men. His rise was rapid, for soon he was made a colonel and given apartments in the Imperial palace ; but his downfall was almost as swift. It had become a matter of speculation at Court as to whether he should have to give place in her Majesty's affections to Ivan Ivanovitch, or the latter to him. But though each lived on the most amicable terms with the other, as did both of them with Razumovsky, one of Ivan Ivanovitch's uncles, fearing his nephew's loss of the Imperial favour and his own loss of influence, concocted a scandalous story against Nitika Beketoff, which her Majesty believed. Almost broken-hearted, she retired to nurse her grief in the seclusion of Tsarskoe Selo, while he was commanded to remain at Peterhoff, where he fell into a fever and during his delirium talked of nothing but the Empress. On his recovery he was made Governor of Astracan, this being a gracious mode of banishing from Court one whose presence would have disturbed her Majesty's peace. Ivan Ivanovitch therefore kept his place in the Imperial favour, but as he was amiable and unambitious, Bestuzhev had no cause to

fear his interference, and understanding this, the Great Chancellor became his friend.

Meantime the Grand Duchess, whose eyes and ears were wide open to all that passed, and on whom example was not lost, was quietly biding her time. With her active mind, her ambition, her ardent nature, life must have been at times intolerable to her, tied as she was to a husband who was little better than a fool, watched over incessantly as she was by a tyrannical sentinel, and for ever in fear of incurring one of the Empress's fiery outbursts of wrath. But presently she found some variety from her perpetual reading and her enforced attendance at drills and reviews of puppet soldiers. It could scarcely have been possible for her to have followed the new interest that came like a ray of light into the darkness of her days, if she had not previously won the favour of Madame Choglokova by repelling the advances made by that lady's fat and foolish husband. This proof of sense and propriety raised her in the eyes of her guardian dragon so much, that the latter invited the Grand Duchess to her rooms continually, and so relieved her from the weariness of Peter's society and from being obliged to walk with him for hours at a time up and down the room until she was ready to drop from fatigue, while he talked of his soldiers and his dogs, or planned the building at Oranienbaum of a monastery, where they and their suite should wear

the habits of Capuchins, bake their own bread and draw water from a well. The Grand Duchess was also relieved to some extent of a vigilance which was deemed unnecessary over one who had resisted such powerful temptation as Madame's adored husband represented.

The first interest in Catherine's dull life embodied itself in the handsome person of Count Zachar Czernicheff, one of the three of that surname who formerly had been in the service of the Grand Duke, and who without any specified charge against them, had been suddenly dismissed and sent to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, from which they had subsequently been released and given appointments in the army. The Grand Duchess had not quite lost sight of them during their absence from Court, as one of them, Andrew, while yet in the fortress had managed to send her a letter through her wardrobe maid ; to conceal which the terrified Grand Duchess had slipped it under her garter and into her stocking, though its contents were mere prosaic requests for certain necessaries of life. Meeting Count Zachar Czernicheff at one of the Court balls, she smiled on him graciously, as on one who had formerly been in her husband's suite. In return he told her she had grown much handsomer since last they met. This, she says, was the first time in her life that anything of the kind had been said to her, and not only

did she take it in good part, but was ready to believe it. At every ball he found some fresh compliment to pay her, until soon he sent her a device or valentine that contained printed verses full of tenderness ; in return for which she sent him a device that answered his lines without compromising her. Verses written in his own hand followed, which were the prelude to a sentimental correspondence. Eventually at a masquerade he, who from living in her household must have had some clue to her temperament, said he had a thousand things to tell her which he could not trust to paper, and he therefore begged that he might be granted a moment's interview in her chamber or some other place which she thought suitable. She assured him that it was utterly impossible for her to leave her rooms and that they were inaccessible. With the ready resources of a lover, he proposed that he should disguise himself as a servant and visit her, but she would not listen to this dangerous suggestion, and she says that the matter went no further than a secret correspondence. That it had no other result may be attributed to her discretion, or to the fact that he was obliged to leave the capital and join his regiment, according to the opinion of the reader.

But this flirtation evidently had the effect of preparing the way for others, whose sequels were more interesting. There were at this time two chamberlains

at the Court of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, brothers, the descendants of one of the oldest and noblest families in the empire, whose names were Peter and Sergius Soltikoff. The elder, Peter, who had a flat nose, staring eyes, and the stupidest of faces, was a tale-bearer who gained favour in the eyes of Madame Choglokova and her spouse, and ultimately received the reward of his ugliness and his mischief-making when he became engaged to the little hunch-back Princess of Courland, much to the anger of her ardent admirer the Grand Duke, with whose platonic affections she continued to be favoured until he grew tired of her prattle which interrupted his own. The younger brother Sergius, now in his twenty-sixth year, differed in all respects from his brother. The whole Court could not show a handsomer man, while there were few more accomplished or with manners more polished. The fascination he naturally exercised was perfected by practice ; for there was scarce a woman in society to whom he was not devoted, with the exception of his wife whom he had married for love. Intrigue was the pursuit of his life ; he was unburdened by principles, and he was daring to rashness—traits that eminently fitted him for the rôle he was about to play ; for scarcely had he entered on his duties as chamberlain to their Imperial Highnesses than he began to make love to the Grand Duchess with all the subtle arts of which he was master.

This diversion of his was not only shared but aided by his friend Leon Narichkine, a gentleman of the bedchamber to the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, who had received his appointment about the same time as the brothers Soltikoff had received theirs. A side-light may be thrown on the intrigues of the Court when it it stated that his sister had been loved by the younger favourite of the Empress, Ivan Ivanovitch; a fact that coming to her Majesty's knowledge led her to command the girl's immediate marriage with a man for whom she had an aversion. Elizabeth's efforts to remove temptation from the path of youth were sanctioned by fate, which went a step further in removing the lady from this wicked world. To balance the unkindness shown to one member of the family, another member, Leon Narichkine, had been appointed a gentleman of the bedchamber to their Imperial Highnesses. A man of much originality, a lover of humour and something of a buffoon, he was an inestimable boon to their dull Court. An incessant talker, all the superficial knowledge he had so quickly acquired was displayed by him with amusing flippancy; and at a second's notice he could give a dissertation on art or literature, on politics or warfare, on metaphysics or geology, using all the technical terms belonging to his subject, and mixing them up with brilliant epigrams and amazing incongruities in a cataract of words which neither he himself nor any one

else could make head or tail of, and at whose nonsense he was as ready to laugh as were his hearers.

To these young men, Leon Narichkine and Sergius Soltikoff, both of whom were susceptible, the Grand Duchess, dazzlingly handsome, high-spirited, just emerging into womanhood, and with a panting desire for pleasure, was an object of irresistible fascination. Their friendship was unruffled by vulgar jealousies, and as a rule their court was paid at the same time to the same object. But owing to the watchfulness of those around her, it was not easy to find opportunities of flirting with her Imperial Highness ; however as Leon Narichkine was a man of resource, he hit upon a plan that secured them more liberty. On the evenings when there was no ball at Court, or when her Majesty did not attend a dramatic performance, the Grand Duke gave a concert in his rooms which his wife and all their suite were bound to attend, and in which he took part, rasping on his violin until his hearers ears were ready to split. At this time Madame Choglokova, who was expecting to become a mother, frequently kept her own rooms leaving her husband to guard their charges. To him the concerts of the Grand Duke were an intolerable boredom until Leon suggested that he should write verses which would afterwards be set to music and sung at these performances.

Devoid of imagination and stupid as he was,

Choglokov like so many dull people was inordinately vain ; and delighted at having the talents in which he believed, recognised by Leon, he set about gratifying his wishes. Therefore with great *empressement* he used to retire from distraction into a corner of the room, where with infinite labour he wrote doggerel verses that had not even the merits of common sense. While he was thus safely occupied the young people amused themselves to their hearts content. At the close of the evening when he brought his lines to them, they were unanimous in declaring them charming, a verdict that softened his heart and decreased his rigour to those gifted with such appreciation. Leon then set them to music and sang them to hearers whose suppressed laughter nearly caused them to suffocate. In this way when they desired to rid themselves of this fatuous booby, they had only to ask him to do them the favour of writing one of his delightful songs.

While the poor man was perspiring over his work as he sat near the stove one evening, Sergius, making violent love to her Imperial Highness, drew a glowing picture of the happiness which he promised himself. It may have been as a reproof that she reminded him he had married for love two years ago. At that, after the manner of married lovers, he sighed and declared he was then paying dearly for having yielded to a moment of infatuation. We have it on the authority

of the Grand Duchess herself that she strove to check his ardour, and really expected to succeed, but she adds, "unfortunately I listened also." Though she candidly admits that his declaration made no difference in her manner or conduct towards him, she also says that she never saw him but in the presence of the Court. This statement is relative as to time; for a day came when during a hunt they found themselves, by one of those delightful accidents that not unfrequently happen to lovers, separated from their party, and when Sergius this time made love to her, she listened to his glowing phrases without interrupting him. Her own words so delicately relate what followed, that they had best be given as they stand.

"He described to me," she says, "the plan which he had arranged for enshrouding, as he said, in profound mystery the happiness which might be enjoyed in such a case. I did not say a word. He took advantage of my silence to persuade me that he loved me passionately, and he begged that I would allow him to hope at least that he was not wholly indifferent to me. I told him that he might amuse himself with hoping what he pleased, as I could not prevent his thoughts. Finally he drew comparisons between himself and others at the Court, and made me confess that he was preferable to them. From that he concluded that he was preferred. I laughed at all this, but I

admitted that he was agreeable to me. At the end of an hour and a half's conversation I desired him to leave me, since so long a conversation might give rise to suspicion. He said he would not go unless I told him that I consented. I answered, 'Yes, yes, but go away.' He said, 'Then it is settled,' and put spurs to his horse. I cried after him, 'No, no,' but he repeated, 'Yes, yes.' And thus we separated." With heightened colour and flashing eyes, she then galloped off to join the hunt, which by the way took place on an island belonging to Choglokov. When the sport was over they all returned to the one house it could boast of, where supper had been prepared for them; but while enjoying this meal a sudden gale sprang up which lashed the surrounding waters to such a height that they covered the island and the steps leading to the dwelling. It was not until two in the morning, when the storm had spent itself and the tide had subsided, that they were able to get back to dry land. While they all waited, laughing at their predicament and fearfully speculating on what would happen if the house were inundated, Sergius found an opportunity to tell the Grand Duchess that Heaven had favoured him by allowing him to enjoy her company for so long a time that day; for like most successful lovers, he was willing to believe a special providence had interested itself in his behalf. "He thought himself already quite happy," says the

object of his love, "but as for me I was not at all so. A thousand apprehensions troubled me, and I was unusually dull, and very much out of conceit with myself. I had persuaded myself that I could easily govern both his passions and my own, and I found that both tasks were difficult, if not impossible."

Their Imperial Highnesses and their Court were soon after ordered to take up their residence at the Grand Duke's country place, Oranienbaum. Here he drilled his servants, hunted, gambled, and drank. Occupied in this way he had no time to look after his wife ; while those whose duty it was to watch her had their attention diverted and their rigidness softened by clever intriguers. The Grand Duchess on her part gained the gratitude of poor Madame Choglokova by the sudden and deep affection she showed for one of her children, whom she, Catherine, caressed and petted, for whom she made clothes, and procured all kinds of playthings ; Sergius by a thousand artifices contrived to play the part of friend, confidant, and counsellor to Choglokov ; while Leon was indefatigable in his endeavours to amuse and distract both husband and wife. As the courtiers knew that no one would trouble himself by listening to or diverting two arrogant and conceited fools all day long without some purpose, whisperings and rumours soon spread, not only through the Court at Oranienbaum, but to that of Peterhoff where the Empress was. A secret

council was then held by the lovers, when in order to avert the storm of Imperial wrath they feared, it was decided that Sergius and Leon should, under the pretence of being sent away by Choglokov, retire to their respective homes for three weeks or a month until the gossip had time to die away. This was done without delay, but scarce had they gone when the Empress sent word that their Imperial Highnesses should join her at Cronstadt, for which she had set out in order to open a canal that had been begun by Peter the Great, but was only then finished.

On the evening when she expected them by sea, a fierce storm began to rage, at which she showed the greatest anxiety for their safety. Seeing from her windows a ship tossed about by the waves, she fancied it might be the yacht on which they were making their voyage, and taking the relics she always kept by her bedside, of all places in the world, she carried them to the window and held them in front of the tossing vessel. As it happened, the yacht she had sent for them did not reach Oranienbaum till after the storm, but when they joined her Majesty her recent anxiety had softened her towards them, and the Grand Duchess was not scolded or reproached as she had feared. The canal was opened and blessed with great solemnity, after which their Imperial Highnesses were sent back again to their country residence.

A few weeks later they were transferred to Moscow,

Sergius joining the Court there, followed by Leon. Though the lovers were now even more circumspect than before, they had to face a danger none of them suspected. While attending a Court ball one evening, they noticed the Grand Duke whispering for a considerable time to Choglokov, who appeared vexed and who subsequently scowled at Sergius. Suspicious as to their conversation, the latter sought out Martha Schafiroff, to whom Peter was then paying attention, and with whom Sergius had already insinuated himself so that he might learn from her if the babbling Grand Duke suspected him. She at once told him that several times lately his Imperial Highness had said that his wife and Sergius were making a fool of Choglokov. He knew the latter was in love with her, though she could not endure him, and that Sergius, who was in his confidence, made him believe that he was interceding for him while in reality he was making love himself to her Imperial Highness, who laughed at both of them ; but as he pitied that poor devil Choglokov, Peter said he would undeceive him, and he would then see who was his true friend, the Grand Duchess or himself.

After a brief consultation with the Grand Duchess, Sergius, putting a bold face on the matter went and asked Choglokov what was the matter with him. At first his only answers were sighs, then he spoke sadly of the difficulties of finding faithful friends, and finally

yielding to the influence of soothing words, he told him that the Grand Duke had out of frankness and friendship opened his eyes to what had been going on under them. With a slight use of his gentle art of cajolery and persuasion, Sergius had little difficulty in convincing the poor man that he was not a fool, that it would be impossible to deceive one so acute as himself, and that the Duke's opinions were not to be relied on. In this way his self-esteem was restored to him, and his confidence in Sergius confirmed. The Grand Duchess, indignant with her spouse, told him she knew all he had told Choglokov, when Peter blushed and sulked but said no more on the subject.

Having overcome the hostility with which she had been treated by the Choglokovs, the Grand Duchess, who was now beginning to make her intelligence perceptible to the ambassadors whom she met at Court ceremonies, and had recently shown some diplomatic skill in the advice given to her husband regarding his duchy of Holstein which Denmark coveted, now determined to make an effort towards gaining the goodwill of one she considered her chief enemy, who was responsible for the restrictions imposed on her and for the watchfulness that dogged her. This was the Great Chancellor, Count Alexis Bestuzhev, who had his own reasons for meeting her half-way.

Always watchful and wary, he had by this time

come to recognise her remarkable abilities, the unfailing tact with which she who was placed in a dangerous position had glided over a thousand perils, the fascination she exercised over those who approached her, and the pride she felt in the country of her adoption. He had also noticed the hopeless foolishness of her husband, whose mental growth seemed to have been arrested in his boyhood, and to have left him with the understanding of a child; who delighting in play and devoted to toys, was indifferent to state affairs and without ambition, ignorant, knowing no restraint, a babbler and a drunkard, who was unable to control this vice even when dining in public in the company of the Empress. Worse than all in the eyes of the Great Chancellor, Peter despised and disparaged everything Russian, and was the slavish worshipper of his chief enemy, Frederick II., the uniform of whose army he wore, whose drill he introduced to his little company of German soldiers, and whom he had been heard to style "my master." If he disliked Peter, that feeling was amply returned by the Grand Duke, who regarded him as Frederick's inveterate enemy.

The dreaded possibility of seeing the Grand Duke seated on the Imperial throne had recently been brought close before Bestuzhev by the fact that Elizabeth, addicted among other excesses to wine, had been seized with fits that seriously threatened her

life, much to the alarm of all patriots, and to the ill-concealed exultation of her nephew. Were she to die to-morrow or next day, he would undoubtedly allow Russia to become the subservient tool of Prussia, and would be enabled to punish with exile or death those he disliked, or whom he regarded as his enemies. Such a catastrophe could be averted only in one way, to deprive him of the crown in favour of another, his son if he had one, his wife in lieu of an heir. Bestuzhev therefore recognised that he must reverse his policy regarding Catherine, whom he had begun by treating as a precocious child in need of suppression, but whom he had been forced by her strength of character to regard as a power, and to whom he began to look as the saviour of Russia.

When therefore the Grand Duchess in her desire to win so powerful an ally, bade a courtier named Bremse repeat some complimentary remark she made regarding Bestuzhev to him, the Great Chancellor sent her word that she might command him whenever she thought proper to do so, and that he desired her to select some trustworthy person by whom they might communicate with each other, for it was desirable that their alliance should be kept a secret from the Empress and the Court. To her there seemed no person more reliable than her chief lover, Sergius, who therefore accordingly waited on Bestuzhev, from whom he met a cordial reception. Bestuzhev at

once spoke of the Court of their Imperial Highnesses with as intimate a knowledge as if he were its inmate. Sergius, who was referred to as the intimate friend of her Imperial Highness, was given wise and useful advice, the stupidity of the Choglokovs was commented on, and a message was sent to the Grand Duchess to the effect that, in gratitude for the kindly feeling she had shown him, the Great Chancellor would do her a little service ; which was, that he would make her chief lady-in-waiting and spy, Madame Vladislava, "as gentle as a lamb for her, so that she will be able to do with her whatever she pleases." He added that the Grand Duchess would see he was not such an ogre as he had been represented to her. Sergius returned with this news, which delighted them both, but which they kept to themselves.

His benevolence towards them was furthermore felt in another direction ; for with his views regarding the succession, it can hardly be doubted that his influence and interference were accountable for the interview which almost immediately afterwards took place between Catherine and her dragon, Madame Choglokova. Through her, the Empress had frequently and severely scolded their Imperial Highnesses for their neglect in not giving an heir to the crown ; and now after having patiently waited eight years for that event, her Majesty determined that she would not be disappointed any longer. Therefore

Madame Choglokova, more than usually full of importance, came one day to Catherine, and drawing her on one side said she must speak to her. What follows is so incredible that it must be given in the exact words of her Imperial Highness as set down in her Memoirs.

"I opened my eyes and ears and not without cause," she writes. "Madame Choglokova began with a long preamble after her fashion, respecting her attachment to her husband, her own prudent conduct, what was necessary and what was not necessary for ensuring mutual love and facilitating conjugal ties; and then she went on to say, that occasionally there were situations in which a higher interest demanded an exception to the rule. I let her talk on without interruption, not knowing what she was driving at, a good deal astonished and uncertain whether it was not a snare she was laying for me, or whether she was speaking with sincerity. Just as I was making these reflections in my own mind, she said to me, 'You shall presently see whether I love my country and whether I am sincere; I do not doubt but you have cast an eye of preference upon some one or other; I leave you to choose between Sergius Soltikoff and Leon Narichkine —if I do not mistake it is the latter.' Here I exclaimed, 'No, no, not at all.' 'Well, then,' she said, 'if it be not Narichkine, it is Soltikoff.' To that I made no reply, and she went on saying, 'You shall

see that it will not be I who will throw difficulties in your way.' I played the simpleton to such a degree," adds the minx, " that she scolded me for it several times both in town and country."

Within a warrantable time from this conversation, the Grand Duchess showed that she was amenable to reason, and would do her duty in providing Russia with an heir. However, the hopes she gave rise to were not at this time fulfilled. During the six weeks which as a consequence of her illness she was obliged to keep her room, the Empress came to see her and showed great concern, but as a rule she was left so much alone that she often cried from ennui. During that time the Grand Duke kept in his own apartments, where his servants secretly provided him with toys and with strong drink, of which they took their share. Often when drunk they refused to obey him, when he would soundly beat them with a stick, or the blade of his sword. Occasionally he went into his wife's room which adjoined, to complain of them, and in response, when she was sufficiently recovered, she would go back with him and scold them, when they immediately became respectful and resumed their proper places much to the wonder of Peter, who used to say that a word or a frown from her did more than the soundest thrashing he could give them. One day when she went to restore order in his room, she was astonished to see a huge rat surrounded by

all the paraphernalia of an execution hanging in the centre of a cabinet. On being asked what this meant, his Imperial Highness gravely replied that the rat had committed a crime which according to the laws of war was deserving of capital punishment ; for climbing over a cardboard fortress it had eaten two sentinels made of pitch who were on duty guarding the bastions. The criminal having being caught by one of his dogs, had been tried by martial law, sentenced to be hanged, and as a warning to all others of his kind, exposed for three days. When his wife laughed at this, he was greatly displeased, until she excused herself on her ignorance of martial law.

A more exciting incident in her narrow life happened a little later when the Imperial palace at Moscow, an immense wooden structure covering three or four versts in circumference, took fire. It was not uncommon to see four or five of the timber houses in the city aflame at the same time, though this does not appear to have induced the authorities to take ordinary precautions against such accidents. Fortunately it was in broad daylight the palace took fire, so that all its inmates escaped. When the Grand Duchess ran into the street that was thick with mud in consequence of previous heavy rains, she found a carriage belonging to the chapel master waiting outside. Stepping into this she was enabled to see the effete efforts made to save the building, the scores of rats and mice that

descended the grand staircase in file, and the soldiers moving every piece of furniture they could lay hold of, among others a chest of drawers belonging to the Grand Duke, which being badly fastened burst open displaying bottles of wine stowed away in them.

While she waited, not knowing where she should be ordered to, Choglokov came to say that her Majesty, who had already gone to Pokrovsky House, had sent word that their Imperial Highnesses should take up their residence in his dwelling. This had a hall in the centre and four rooms at either side ; the wind blew in every direction through the ill-fastened and half-rotten door and windows, the boards of the floor had shrunk, it was almost bare of furniture, and there were vermin everywhere. Such of her clothes and belongings as had been snatched from the fire had been left in the mud and rain all night in front of the palace, but were brought to her next day. The Empress lost the small portion of her wardrobe that she had taken with her to Moscow—that is to say, four thousand dresses, together with many valuables, among them a marvellous bowl covered with engraved stones, that had been brought from Constantinople, had cost eight thousand ducats, and had been presented to her by the elder favourite.

On account of his appointment at Court, Choglokov seldom inhabited his horrible residence, where however his children lived. It was therefore while he was at

the palace—which the Empress had so hastily reconstructed that in six weeks after the fire her apartments were habitable—that he was taken seriously ill. On learning that his recovery was hopeless, her Majesty, who had a terrible fear of death, gave orders that he should be carried to his own house, where he died a few days later. This was a severe blow to the Grand Duchess. After years spent in studying his character, and in humouring his vanity, she had succeeded not only in overcoming his ill-nature but in winning his sympathy. His wife also, who had begun as a harsh and spiteful Argus, had with patience and perseverance been won over; but now death had removed the one and the Empress the other; for hearing that within a short time of her husband's funeral she had gone from her own house to the palace to visit her Imperial Highness, her Majesty, who had severe views on the duties and conduct of widows, immediately dismissed Madame Choglokova from all further attendance on Catherine.

The latter, who was once more expecting soon to become a mother, waited in fear and trembling the appointment of her new jailers, and was plunged into despair on learning that Count Alexander Schouvaloff and his wife had been named for that post. This man, it will be remembered, was one of the uncles of the younger favourite Ivan Ivanovitch Schouvaloff, through whose influence he had rapidly risen. Among other offices held by him was that of chief of the

state inquisition, or as it was called the Secret Chancery, where suspected persons were tortured in the hope of forcing confessions from them. Not only was he dreaded by the Court and the city, but by the whole empire. Personally his long grim countenance was made more revolting by a convulsive movement of the right side of his face from the eye to the jaw whenever he experienced joy, anger, grief, or anxiety. The Grand Duchess, used as she was to the strange treatment she received, thought it extraordinary that a man afflicted with such a hideous grimace should have been selected for a post that placed him continually in the presence of one who was about to become a mother, and whom she never saw without a shudder of repugnance, because it reminded her of his office, the horrors of which it was said had caused this affliction.

Another reason for her dislike to him, which she was obliged to keep secret, was his enmity towards her new and powerful friend Bestuzhev, whose high position he envied. As for the Countess Schouvaloff, though less hideous she was the most tiresome woman imaginable, according to the Grand Duchess, who adds that their appointment was "only a beginning of the good times they were preparing for us, especially for me." Soon after they had been placed at her Court she was ordered to St. Petersburg, for her confinement. It was arranged that the journey should take twenty-nine days, as she was to travel only one post-station

a day. Her great fear then became that Sergius and Leon, whose relaxed attentions had already given her much displeasure, would be left behind at Moscow. They were, however, included in her suite, but this did not give her the pleasure she expected, for under the eye of Schouvaloff and his wife, Sergius declared they dared not come near her. When eventually, she reached St. Petersburg, after a long and wearisome ride in a carriage packed with three other women, they occasionally found opportunities at the Grand Duke's concerts for a little conversation. "But," says the Grand Duchess, "my hypochondria had become such that at every moment, and at every word, my eyes filled with tears, and my mind was disturbed with apprehensions; in a word I could not get it out of my head that everything tended to the removal of Sergius Soltikoff."

CHAPTER IV

Birth of the Grand Duke Paul—Rejoicings at his birth—His mother receives a paltry present—Her lover Sergius is sent to Sweden—The Grand Duchess resolves to show her spirit—Life of their Imperial Highnesses at their country seat—Peter plays at soldiers—Catherine reads Voltaire—The predictions of a Seer—England desires an alliance with Russia—An English Ambassador's view of the Russian Court—The career of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams—The Court of Sweden—Young Stanislaus Poniatowski in Paris and London—The Duchess of Gordon's dinner—Poniatowski goes to Russia with the English Ambassador—The Grand Duchess is pleased with Sir Charles—The Grand Duke's dolls—Catherine's midnight visits to her friends—Russia's rapacious ministers—English gold is freely scattered—Sir Charles proposes to purchase the Empress Elizabeth—He describes her Court—His observations on the Grand Duchess—The Chevalier Douglas arrives at St. Petersburg—Elizabeth sends an unofficial message to the French Court—The Chevalier D'Eon and his secret mission—His disguise as a female—Intrigues at the Russian Court—The King of Prussia's treaty with England—Friendship between England and Russia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Disappointment of the English Ambassador—Displeasure of the Empress at the treaty between England and Prussia—The growing influence of the Grand Duchess—The health of the Empress—The attempted murder of the French Chargé d'Affaires and the Secretary of Legation.

TOWARDS midday on September 20th, 1754, the Grand Duchess gave birth to a son who was fated to add one more to the tragic figures of Russian

history. He had scarcely been dressed when the Empress, who had been present at the accouchement, summoned a priest who gave him the name of Paul. Her Majesty then ordered the midwife to take the child and follow her to her own apartments; and no sooner had she gone than the Grand Duke and the Schouvaloffs also quitted the room, leaving the patient in a state of prostration, lying on a bed placed under two windows that would not close, and between two doors that were left open. Though unable to move from weakness Madame Vladislava declared she dared not touch her; and when burning with thirst she asked for water, the same lady-in-waiting replied that she dared not give it until the midwife came back. Though sent for several times, this woman did not return until some four hours later, when she declared herself unable to get away sooner, the Empress was so taken up with the child.

A violent fever followed this neglect, during which the sufferer was left alone, few having a thought for her, the Grand Duke least of all, for at this time he drank all that he could get smuggled to his rooms. And not only was the mother prevented from seeing her new-born son, but she dared not openly inquire for him, lest her questions would impute want of care on her Majesty's part. What she learned of him by stealth was not reassuring. Not only was he kept in the Empress's own room which was excessively warm,

but he was wrapped in flannels, and laid in a cradle lined with black fox skins ; while over him was a coverlet of quilted satin lined with wadding, and above that again was one of rose-coloured velvet lined with black fox skins, as a consequence of which his body was continually bathed in perspiration.

No one at Court doubted that this child, born nine years after the marriage of his mother, was the son of Sergius Soltikoff, but this did not prevent great rejoicings to celebrate the birth of an heir to the Russian throne ; so that balls, fêtes, and illuminations followed close upon each other, while the Grand Duchess lay ill, neglected, and severely suffering from ennui. This was momentarily relieved when after the child had been baptized with great solemnity, the Czarina visited and brought her an order for one hundred thousand roubles, a most acceptable gift to one who was heavily in debt, and had not a sou. But no sooner had she cashed it than the secretary of the Imperial Cabinet sent to beg of her for Heaven's sake to lend him the money ; for as it afterwards turned out, the Grand Duke on hearing that his wife was so handsomely recompensed for producing an heir to the crown, flew into a passion because he was not also rewarded, and complained so persistently that the Empress sent him an order for a similar sum. As there was not a rouble in the Imperial treasury to meet this, the money just received by the Grand Duchess

was borrowed for the purpose. Four months later she was repaid.

At the same time as the order for this amount was given her, the Empress also presented her with a small casket. On opening this the Grand Duchess saw it contained only a very poor necklace with ear-rings and two wretched rings, such as she would have felt ashamed to offer one of her maids ; the whole not costing a hundred roubles. Not thinking them worth wearing, she put them away in her cabinet, but later on when asked by Count Alexander Schouvaloff how she liked them, she replied with her usual tact, that whatever came from her Majesty was always of inestimable value in her eyes. Later still when he inquired why she never wore them, her answer was that on the Empress's fêtes she was accustomed to wear the most beautiful things she possessed, and that the necklace and ear-rings did not come within that category.

She was still struggling to regain strength, when she was told that the two persons in her suite whose company she valued most were about to be sent away : Sergius to Sweden that he might officially announce the birth of her son, while her favourite lady-in-waiting and confidante, the Princess Gagarine, had been ordered to get married. At this news the Grand Duchess "buried herself in her bed," where she did nothing but grieve. Forty days after her

confinement, her son was brought into her room, when she saw him for the first time since his birth. She had scarcely time to take him in her arms when he was whisked away again, and she was left once more to the solitude whose only solace was found in the books she eagerly read. A winter that was long and dreary for her came and went; for although from Christmas to Lent the Russian nobles vied with each other in giving splendid dinners, balls, masquerades, and fêtes in honour of her son, she felt too depressed and ill to attend any of them.

A ray of light fell upon her life when at the end of Lent, Sergius returned from Sweden. During his absence the Great Chancellor, Bestuzhev, had communicated to her all the news he had received from him, as well as the dispatches in which his name was mentioned from Count Pannin, the Russian Envoy to the Swedish Court. From these, which had been surreptitiously forwarded to her through Madame Vladislava, whose step-son was chief clerk to Bestuzhev, she also learned that Sergius would be dispatched to Hamburg as resident minister of Russia, news that filled her with the deepest grief. No sooner had he returned than he, now no longer a member of her suite, sent word through Leon that he greatly desired to see her. On being consulted, Madame Vladislava consented to their interview. It was arranged that he should visit her on a certain evening, but she waited

until three in the morning in deadly anxiety as to what had occurred to prevent his coming, and then learned next day that he had been enticed into a lodge of Freemasons, from where, he said, he could not get away without exciting suspicions.

Doubting the truth of this, she questioned and cross-questioned Leon to such purpose that it became clear as day that he had failed to keep his engagement from want of inclination, regardless of all she had suffered from her attachment to him. She then wrote him a letter bitterly complaining of his indifference, when he came to see her. "He had little difficulty in appeasing me, for I was only too well disposed to accept his apologies," writes the Grand Duchess. On his advice she abandoned her melancholy and went into public once more. The birthday of her husband was, as became a dutiful wife, selected for her re-appearance. Burning with indignation at the idea that Sergius was to be sent away from her, and resenting the neglects and slights she had recently experienced, she now plucked up spirit and determined she would show she was not to be offended with impunity. As a consequence she lost no opportunity of exhibiting her profound contempt for the Schouvaloffs, of whose stupidity and malice she spoke, at whom she flung a thousand sarcasms, and whom she continually ridiculed. Added to this she never failed to pay attention to those whom the Schouvaloffs disliked, and they were

numerous. "In a word," says this valiant young woman, "I drew myself up, and with head erect stood forth rather like a chief of a great party than a person humbled and oppressed. The Schouvaloffs knew not what to make of me."

Soon, however, Count Peter Schouvaloff ingratiated himself with the Grand Duke, to whom he then complained of her Imperial Highness. A trifle muddled, but eager to carry out the instructions given him, the Grand Duke strutted into his wife's room one day after dinner and told her that she had become intolerably proud, but that he would soon bring her to her senses. When she was curious enough to inquire how this was to be done, he propped himself against the wall and half drew his sword. At that she told him that if he meant to fight she must have a sword also, at which he put his back into its scabbard. He still mumbled that she had become dreadfully spiteful, especially to the Schouvaloffs, when he was told it was only tit for tat, and that he had better not meddle with matters he knew nothing about, and could not understand. He then began to talk in so extravagant a fashion that she saw it was useless to argue with him, and instead of doing so advised him to go to bed, "for I saw clearly," she says, "that wine had disturbed his reason and stupefied what little sense he naturally possessed. He followed my advice and retired."

In the early spring their Imperial Highnesses were ordered to their country place, Oranienbaum, though the young heir was not allowed to accompany them. Before leaving St. Petersburg, however, the boy's mother was graciously permitted to see him, this being the third time she had that privilege during the six months of his life. It was at Oranienbaum at this time that Peter, who previously had drilled puppets and servants by stealth, now took the daring resolve to bring over from Holstein a detachment of real soldiers. This he could not have done but for the acquiescence of the Schouvaloffs, who by conniving at this hobby, believed they were securing the favour of the future Emperor, who would regard them as his friends and become a pliant tool in their hands. The importation of his soldiers was represented by them as a mere harmless whim to the Empress, who detested Holstein and everything that came from it. The detachment embarked at Kiel and landed at Cronstadt, from where it marched to Oranienbaum, where it was met by Peter, who had dressed himself in the uniform of a Holstein officer.

This whim had more far-reaching consequences to him than could have been foreseen by this foolish youth; for from the first, the introduction of these German soldiers was hateful to the Russian people. On seeing them file by on their arrival at Oranienbaum, the guards had muttered, "These cursed

Germans are all sold to the King of Prussia ; it is so many traitors they are bringing into Russia," and later, when they were obliged to carry food to the camp from the house, they rebelled against being made "lackeys to those cursed Germans." Though the Grand Duke was quite indifferent to the injurious effect his partiality for his Holstein soldiers had on the people, his astute wife took care to show that she in no way approved of this importation of foreigners, and disassociated herself from her husband's "mischievous child's play," as she terms it. He, however, delighted in drilling and marching his men, in hearing bugles blown and drums rolled all day long, and that he might be in the midst of his countrymen he took up his quarters in the camp. But neither in his occupations by day, nor in his smoking or drinking bouts by night, would the gentlemen of the household have any part, being unwilling to associate with his officers, who, as the Princess Daschkaw tells us in her memoirs, "had been for the most part corporals and sergeants in the Prussian service, the truant sons of German shoemakers, and as such had risen from the very dregs of the people."

In the meantime the Grand Duchess passed her time in reading Voltaire, in laughing at Leon's nonsense and love-making, and in laying out a garden in which she was assisted by the advice of an old gardener named Lamberti, who as a seer had predicted that

the Empress, when Princess Elizabeth, would mount the throne, and who assured Catherine that she would yet be sole sovereign of Russia, named the date when this event should take place, and added that she would live to fourscore years or more. Her infatuation for Sergius Soltikoff was now beginning to lose force, not only because of that absence which makes the heart grow colder, but on account of rumours that reached her of his amours both in Sweden and at Dresden; rumours she at first refused to believe, but the truth of which was eventually brought home to her. As Leon held but a small place in her affection, she was now ready to enter on one of the romances of her life, the fascinating hero of which was provided for her by a British Ambassador.

For some years past his Majesty King George II. had been made miserable by fears of the designs of France and Prussia on the electorate of Hanover, which was dear to him. To frustrate such dreaded schemes, he desired to enter into a treaty against these countries with Russia and Austria. This, Russia, as represented by her Great Chancellor, Bestuzhev, was eager to conclude, not only because he hated the King of Prussia, but also because he considered that a further accession of that monarch's power would be dangerous to Russia. Bestuzhev therefore raised about sixty thousand recruits, that were to be placed at the service of England in return for a subsidy. The amount of

this, at first fixed at five hundred thousand pounds per annum, was considered too high a price by the English Cabinet, terms were haggled over, trifles were debated, and negotiations dragged so slowly, that at last Bestuzhev, in a dispatch of January 26th, 1755, says he is inclined to believe that they were undertaken merely to spy out the land, and to discover the feelings of the Empress towards Frederick of Prussia.

On his part Guy Dickens, then English Ambassador to the Court of St. Petersburg, complained that Bestuzhev's aversion to business was as great as that of the Empress. "If the Great Chancellor followed my advice," says the Ambassador, "instead of writing representations, he would not lie in bed till noon, but at ten o'clock be in the old favourite's apartments, where the Empress going frequently in and out, he would have opportunities enough to quicken her resolutions upon any points of business lying before her. For months together she has found not a moment of leisure to attend to business." The reason for this was the constant round of amusements at Court. "Since last Wednesday," he writes home in the beginning of March (1755), "we have had not less than three masquerades and one opera, and there is not one day in this week that is not marked out for one diversion or another. The next week begins Lent, when everybody will be praying and fasting; and the week after that, half the town, as is usual, will

be sick by falling at once from the most luxurious to the most abstemious way of living; so that for these three weeks to come, we are not to expect any use will be made here of pen, paper, and ink. Afterwards I hope to set matters agoing, for the Empress cannot be always upon her knees, and other diversions must have their turn."

At the end of that time, as he states in another of his dispatches preserved in the State Paper Office, nothing had been done. The Great Chancellor, he says, never sees or speaks to the Empress, everything being transacted in writing, which has to pass through the young favourite, Ivan Ivanovitch, who lays it before her Majesty when he finds her in the humour for business. "The Great Chancellor himself complains of this state of affairs and these delays," continues the dispatch. "Such proceedings, he said, were a prostitution of their credit and reputation in the eyes of their friends and foes, but he knew no help; for since my last, the young favourite through whose hands all affairs of great or little consequence pass at present, has been ill by having overheated himself in the bacchanalian life which was led here the week before last; so that till he is perfectly recovered, we are not to expect the Empress will mind any business. The young favourite's fit of illness is changed into the rheumatism, which takes up the care and thoughts of the whole Court."

Guy Dickens grew so weary of his mission that he

begged to be recalled. His Majesty, he said, should have at the Russian Court a minister full of vigour; for it was thought that the chief object of his office should be to attend every ball, masquerade, play, opera, or Court day, which he was unable to do at his time of life. His request was granted, and Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, one of the sprightliest, most notable men in London at that period, was appointed in his place. The descendant of an ancient Welsh family, he had been educated at Eton, had inherited a fortune, had made the grand tour of Europe then considered necessary to complete a young man's education, had at the age of three and twenty added to his wealth if not to his happiness by marrying the youngest daughter of the Earl of Coningsby, and to his reputation for ability by becoming a Member of Parliament for the county of Monmouth.

Good-looking, erratic, vivacious, a man who dressed with elaborate care, a finished courtier, an original member of the Society of Dilettanti, a writer of verse more polished than delicate, a seeker of pleasure, ever ready to frame an epigram or tell a story, his brilliant personality won him the companionship of the leading men of his day. An intimate friend of Henry Fox, afterwards Lord Holland, of Stephen Fox, afterwards Lord Ilchester, and of the polite Lord Chesterfield, he was also the correspondent of Horace Walpole, the guest of Pope at Twickenham, the donor of odd

guineas, described as loans, to Henry Fielding the novelist, the associate of Samuel Foote, the merriest of comedians, and of David Garrick, the greatest of tragedians, while he was also the lover of Peg Woffington. Though sought for his sparkling wit, he was dreaded for his barbed satire which was not always confined to politics or politicians. A sample of this, contained in some verses written on the marriage of the beautiful Isabella, Dowager Duchess of Manchester, who from innumerable suitors selected as her second husband an Irishman named Hussey, brought Williams into trouble, and ultimately into diplomacy.

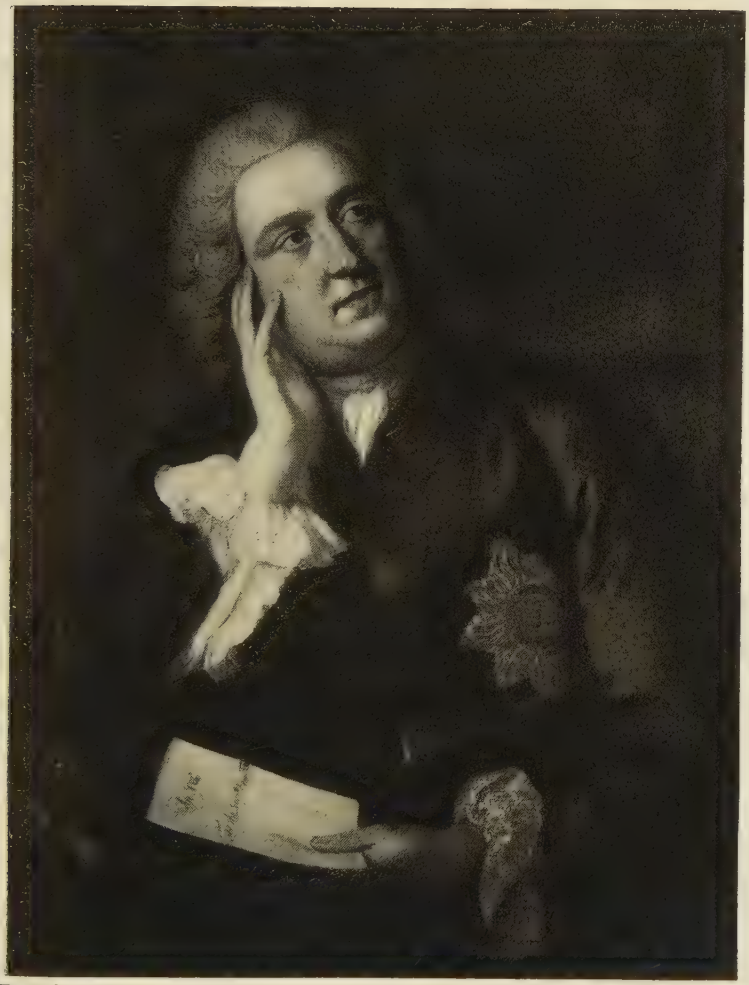
The Duchess's lucky bridegroom, whose courage was beyond suspicion, paid such little heed to the references made to himself in these verses, that he crossed over to his native country without challenging their writer. But several Irishmen living in London thought themselves insulted by the lines which speaking of their race, said—

> Nature indeed denies them sense,
> But gives them legs and impudence
> That beats all understanding.

As a result about a score of them entered into a compact, that the first who met Williams should insult and provoke him to fight. Being unwilling to gratify them at the expense of his life, he hurried into Wales before any one of them could put his intention into practice. His sudden desire for country life was

attributed by himself as due to his grief for the death of a friend. Depression it was also, according to his own testimony, that led him to beg of the King to send him abroad on his Majesty's service. Accordingly in December 1746, having previously been installed a Knight of the Bath, he was appointed Envoy to the Court of Dresden, whose sovereign, Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony, had by the power of Austria and Russia been nominated King of Poland; an unfortunate country, distracted by revolution, impoverished by dismemberment, rent by factions, and overwhelmed by miseries; a country which its monarch seldom saw, of which he knew nothing save that it added to his treasury, of whose language he was too indolent to learn a word, and who during his rare visits to its capital, spent his spare time in shooting dogs as they passed the palace windows.

Sir Charles Hanbury Williams must frequently have regretted his absence from London while resident at a court whose king was seldom visible save when he dined with his buffoons who fought the whole time, after which he retired to his own room where he totally undressed and sat in his nightgown for the remainder of the day; whose queen was ugly and malicious; and whose heir to the crown suffered from a disjointed backbone, so that he could not stand without being supported, and was dragged along



From the picture by Anton Rafael Mengs in the National Portrait Gallery.
Photo by Emery Walker.

SIR CHARLES HANBURY WILLIAMS, K.G.

between two attendants when he wished to move. The English Ambassador was, however, enabled to see something of diplomacy at this court, and hear much regarding the affairs of Russia. Frederick Augustus, hating business, shrinking from the interviews of foreign ministers, and devoting his time to acting as an arbitrator in the quarrels between his buffoons and his opera singers, had broken every promise he had made to the Polish people. As a consequence they would have flung so worthless a wretch from the throne, did they not fear the iron hand of Elizabeth. In one of the visits which Frederick Augustus paid to Warsaw, Sir Charles accompanied him, and here he first met young Stanislaus Poniatowski, who presently was to play an important part in the diplomatic schemes of this ambassador, and later on was destined to reign as king of his unhappy country.

A wider experience of courts and courtiers was enjoyed by Sir Charles when he was appointed Envoy to Turin, and subsequently to Berlin. As, however, he did not succeed in pleasing the severe and eccentric Frederick II., the latter demanded his recall, when Williams resumed his former position at the Court of the Elector of Saxony. When early in 1755, Guy Dickens, weary of the eternal gaiety of the Russian capital, and impatient at the slowness with which ministerial business was conducted, requested to be recalled, a successor was found for him in Sir Charles

Hanbury Williams, whose brilliant social qualities as well as his diplomatic tact and ability were considered to fit him for so difficult a position. Accordingly, in April 1755, he was appointed Ambassador to the Court of St. Petersburg. It was known in ministerial circles that the Court of Russia was divided against itself; that the Empress's young lover by whom she was entirely swayed, favoured France; that the Grand Duke worshipped Frederick of Prussia; and that Bestuzhev above all things desired an alliance with England. What the sympathies were of the Grand Duchess, whose influence was beginning to be recognised, was not clearly known; but it was in the hope of winning these to his cause that Sir Charles determined to take in his suite young Stanislaus Poniatowski, whose fascinations he believed she would find irresistible.

Though a Pole by birth, Stanislaus Poniatowski was a descendant of the second Marquis of Huntly, whose daughter, Lady Catherine Gordon, had gone to Poland as maid-of-honour to Marie of Mantua, wife of Ladislaus IV. Marrying Count Andreas Morsztyn, Lady Margaret eventually became the grandmother of the Princess Constance Czartoryski, wife of Stanislaus Poniatowski, who traced his family to the Tornelli, Counts of Lombardy. A soldier, a courtier, and a diplomatist, he eventually became Castellan of Cracow. Of their ten children the third, young Stanislaus, was the

brightest and most attractive. The qualities he showed as a boy were ripened and polished by his association with courts when he first made his appearance in Paris, unattached either to the army or the diplomatic service, but merely a votary of pleasure, with vague hopes of receiving an appointment at the court or in the suite of some prince or potentate.

Every qualification that could justify a selection where brains or abilities were secondary to personal charm were his. Tall and well made, his movements were graceful, while his face was singularly handsome, not alone because of its delicately cut features, clear pallid complexion, and blue-black hair, but because of his deep grey eyes which in repose had an expression of tender melancholy that more than all else won his way to women's hearts. Added to this he spoke many languages in a voice of singular sweetness, he danced to perfection, was a master in the art of compliments, and possessed a natural fascination over all with whom he came in contact. While in Paris his supreme disregard for money and love of gambling, unbalanced by a sufficient income, led him not only into debt but to prison. There he remained until inquiries regarding his absence from his usual haunts brought news of his fate to Madame Geoffrin, the widow of a looking-glass manufacturer who had left her money enough to gratify her tastes in entertaining philosophers, poets, artists, and men of distinction. Hurrying to

the Fort l'Evêque where Poniatowski was imprisoned, she paid his debts and made him a free man. His gratitude was profuse, and what is more, it was lasting ; for in after years when he was King of Poland he invited her to Warsaw, where his delicate tact showed itself in fitting up for her an apartment that in all details was a facsimile of that she had occupied in Paris. A memory so excellent is seldom given to a recipient of favours.

To stay in a city that had taken the liberty of depriving him of his freedom, and that under the same circumstances might repeat that outrage, was unadvisable. Accordingly he crossed the Channel and appeared in London, where he had heard Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was then residing. The latter warmly welcomed his handsome, distinguished, and accomplished young friend, introduced him to his acquaintances, presented him at Court, gambled with him at White's coffee-house, entertained him at Ranelagh, and was his companion at the playhouses. The impression made by the young Pole on the hearts of women of rank and fashion exceeded anything that could be expected even from such languishing creatures. Invited everywhere, he soon became the fashion. Horace Walpole, in writing from Arlington Street to John Chute in May 1754, tells him of a description that was given him of the most extraordinary declaration of love that ever was made. "Have you seen

the young Poniatowski?" he writes. "He is very handsome. You have seen the figure of the Duchess of Gordon, who looks like a raw-boned Scotch metaphysician that has got a red face by drinking water. One day at the drawing-room, having never spoken to him, she sent one of the foreign ministers to invite Poniatowski to dinner with her for the next day. He bowed and went. The moment the door opened, her two little sons attired as Cupids, with bows and arrows, shot at him; and one of them literally hit his hair, and was very near putting his eye out, and hindering his casting it to the couch,

Where she, another sea-born Venus, lay.

The only company besides this Highland goddess were two Scotchmen who could not speak a word of any language but their own Erse; and to complete the astonishment of this allegorical entertainment, with the dessert there entered a little horse, and galloped round the table—a hieroglyphic I cannot solve. Poniatowski accounts for this profusion of kindness by his great-grandmother being a Gordon; but I believe it may be accounted for by . . . Adieu! my dear sir."

Poniatowski was still enjoying the feverish delights of London life when Sir Charles received his appointment as Ambassador to Russia. From there rumour had spread throughout Europe of the marvellous appreciation of beauty—when embodied in the opposite

sex—which the Grand Duchess had developed. That the young Polish noble with his graceful ways, his pale face with its wonderful eyes and pensive expression, and the irresistible charm of his personality, would please her, was not to be doubted. In presenting her with such an object of admiration, he would certainly bind her to his cause; while the influence of the man she loved would be used for the benefit of his friend and patron. Accordingly when Sir Charles Hanbury Williams set out for the Court of St. Petersburg, Stanislaus Poniatowski went with him. Though holding no recognised position he was described as a secretary.

In the instructions which the new Ambassador to Russia received from Lord Holderness, then Foreign Secretary, dated April 11th, 1755, it was stated that a treaty with Russia must be promptly made; and then continued: "On this occasion it will be proper to convince the Russians that they will remain only an Asiatic power, if they sit still and give the King of Prussia an opportunity of putting in execution his ambitious, dangerous, and long-concerted schemes of aggrandisement. His Majesty has authorised you, by your full powers and instructions, to do what may be necessary on his part for preventing such a calamity." Full of hope and vivacity, armed with authority and carrying with him a means certain of gaining success in one quarter, Sir Charles left England determined

to conquer. It was while their Imperial Highnesses, by order of the Czarina, were celebrating the feast of St. Peter at Oranienbaum, that Catherine entertained Sir Charles and his protégé, whom she had already met the previous Whitsuntide when commanded to appear at St. Petersburg. At this entertainment her eyes were not slow to notice the gracious figure of the young Pole as he danced in the great hall, nor was the English Ambassador less alert in feeding her luminous imagination with some interesting details of his career. Later at supper her conversation with Sir Charles was continued. Lively and well informed as he was, she was greatly pleased with him, as he was with her ; for afterwards she heard that he had spoken in high terms of her.

The Grand Duchess took his appreciation as a matter of course, for she always made a favourable impression on those who suited her in mind and character, as she states in her Memoirs. That Poniatowski was one of these is not to be doubted, though their friendship was not so rapid in formation as might have been expected, owing probably to the watchful eyes of the Court. Its first steps were taken by the assistance of the ever-accommodating, never-jealous Leon, who conveniently fell ill of a fever, which happily was not so violent as to prevent him from sending letters to her which she had no difficulty in seeing were not written by him, and less in recog-

nising that they were the compositions of Poniatowski. For him her replies were meant, though addressed to Leon. The latter soon after proved that his friendship and resource had wider limits.

On returning at the end of autumn to St. Petersburg, their Imperial Highnesses were given apartments in the Winter Palace, which had just been rebuilt by the Empress. Never before had the Grand Duchess had six rooms given to her for her own use and that of her suite; but what pleased her best about them was, that she "was not incommoded by the proximity of the Grand Duke's apartments." This she thought a great point gained, for as he could no longer play with real soldiers while in town, he had an immense number of soldiers made for him of wood, pith, lead, and wax, which he arranged on narrow tables that took up an entire room. All the Court festivities were punctiliously kept by these dolls, who fired cannon, daily relieved guard, and marched to and fro in obedience to strings. Their Imperial master assisted at these movements in full uniform, boots, spurs, and scarf, and also required that uniform should be worn by such of his servants as were permitted to attend them. Leon, who it will be remembered was one of their suite, was continually passing from one set of apartments to another. On desiring to enter those of the Grand Duchess he would mew like a cat, and when answered in the same way would enter.

One evening he came to tell her that his sister-in-law was ill, and suggested that a visit from the Grand Duchess who was very intimate with her, would be gracious on her part and agreeable to the invalid. When her Imperial Highness told him that he knew as well as she did that she could not leave the palace without permission, which would never be given her to visit his sister-in-law Anna Narichkina, Leon said he would take her to Anna's house. At that he was told that he was mad, and would be sent to the fortress; but he continued to argue that it could be managed. The Grand Duke, he said, would as usual leave the supper table tipsy and retire to his own room, when she for greater safety could dress in men's clothes, as she often did when hunting in the country, and they would go together to Anna's house. The expectation or certainty of finding some one else there, discreetly hinted at, no doubt obtained her consent to so dangerous an undertaking. Soon after, on pretence of headache she went to bed early, but no sooner had her lady-in-waiting retired, than Catherine got up, dressed as a man from head to foot, arranged her hair, and impatiently awaited for the expected mew. The instant she heard it she quietly opened her door, and with Leon, slipped through an antechamber and into the hall, at the entrance of which a carriage awaited them.

On reaching Anna Narichkina's house they were

delighted to find that lady had sufficiently recovered to be able to receive them, and was obliging enough to have in her company Stanislaus Poniatowski. After an evening "passed in the wildest gaiety," Catherine returned to the palace without being recognised. A few evenings later she received a return visit from her friends, Leon piloting them so skilfully that no suspicions were aroused. After that these meetings took place two or three evenings a week, their secrecy rendering them doubly delightful.

Meantime Sir Charles was working indefatigably to secure the treaty. But however successful he might be in one point of his mission, he was soon plainly and without false modesty shown that success in another direction must be secured at a high price; for the hand of every man of position or influence in Russia was then as now open as the day to gold. Bestuzhev, the Great Chancellor, a confirmed gambler, whose salary was merely three thousand a year English money, and who lived in a state of general impecuniosity, began by accepting from England ten thousand pounds besides the "usual diplomatic presents" as a stimulus to his promotion of the treaty. He then quietly hinted that an "extraordinary present" might be given to Woronzoff, the Vice-Chancellor. Next came Olsufiow, secretary to the Cabinet, who Sir Charles says is the soul of Woronzoff, who speaks but as Olsufiow prompts.

"For fifteen hundred ducats ready money and five hundred per annum pension, I can secure this person, and I imagine I can make very great use of him," says the English Ambassador. Following him came Wolkow, private secretary to Bestuzhev. "A present of five hundred ducats and a pension of two hundred and fifty will make this person my own," writes Sir Charles. The list of money-graspers was for the present brought to an end by the Saxon Ambassador Funcke, who served his Court faithfully but had received no salary from it for nine quarters. "He will serve the King (George II.) faithfully for the same sum which I have proposed for Olsufiow," writes Williams to Lord Holderness, who on July 24th, 1755, approved of the payment of all these sums.

As a result of this wholesale bribery, a convention was signed on the 9th of the following month, the chief features of which were that Russia's aid to England should extend to all the allies of its sovereign, and that on the first demand for help from England, Russia would march thirty thousand men into Prussia. This convention, it was promised, would be ratified two months from the date of signature. Meanwhile it was not binding

Sir Charles, well pleased with the success of his endeavours, communicated the news to England in glowing spirits. "The Great Chancellor, Bestuzhev," he writes, "exerted himself much to our advantage.

Great joy appeared in his face when he found his avarice satisfied by the private offers. Woronzoff, too, did his best. Would his Majesty be pleased to give him something above his ordinary fees to buy him a ring; five hundred pounds bestowed in this manner would have a great effect in carrying on future business in this Court." Within two days of writing this dispatch, Sir Charles tells Lord Holderness that Bestuzhev assured him in the strongest terms that any augmentation of the payment stipulated in the first article (by which England was to pay five hundred thousand per annum to Russia for a defensive army of fifty-five thousand men) would be "extremely agreeable and a sort of personal obligation to her Imperial Majesty"; he adds that this augmentation "shall put both this Court and the Empress entirely into his Majesty's management; fifty thousand pounds or so for the Empress's private use would have a great effect. In short all that has been given hitherto is to purchase the assistance of the forces of Russia, but this last sum if given will purchase the Empress."

The high satisfaction which Sir Charles felt was considerably damped by hearing from Lord Holderness that fault was found both with the form and the contents of the treaty; that it was demanded that a copy should be signed by the King of England alone, and that it was advisable certain alterations should be made relative to the dates of departure of the Russian

army and the payment of the subsidies. No business however could be transacted by him with her Imperial Majesty, not only on account of her usual disinclination to attend to affairs of state, but because of a sudden fit of illness which seized her towards the end of September.

In an interesting dispatch written on October 2nd, 1755, Sir Charles says: "The state of the Empress's health is extremely bad, for I fear it is beyond a doubt that she has a confirmed dropsy and asthma. Her legs are very much swelled, and have been for over a year. She has a perpetual cough, and is so short-breath'd that she cannot well go up and down stairs, and her Majesty is sensible of the bad state of her health. On the 16th inst. (September) there was a ball at Court, and after the Imperial Ambassador (of Austria) was gone, she told me she would dance a minuet with me. As soon as it was over she was so spent that she retired into her own apartments for a quarter of an hour. She then returned into the ball-room, and taking me aside told me in a very affecting strain how ill she was. She said that her cough had lasted nine minutes, and she could not get rid of it, and that she had quite lost her appetite. Whilst she was telling me this, she was seized with a fit of coughing that obliged her to retire, and she appeared no more.

"But last night it was much worse: she could not

stay in the ballroom a quarter of an hour, and retired to her own apartments very much out of order. She intends if possible going to Count Esterhasy's ball, which he gives in honour of the young Grand Duke next Wednesday, and there is actually a machine making to carry her Majesty from one floor to another without obliging her to mount the stairs. The consternation that appeared last night in the faces of the Schouvaloff family (for the Grand Duke is their open and declared enemy) as well as in all those who form the Empress's private party, is not to be described, and even while I am writing this letter I hear from good hands that the Empress continues ill. I leave your lordship to imagine the alarm which this Court is in. I had much conversation last night with the Great Chancellor upon the present scene. He perhaps is less alarmed than other people, for the Grand Duchess is his friend and is governed by him. As her Imperial Highness is the person who in case of accidents will rule here, I think it will be well to inform the King of my observations upon her, which I can the better do because I often have conversations with her for two hours together, as my rank places me at supper always next to her Imperial Highness, and almost from the beginning of my being here she has treated me with confidence, and sent me word by the Great Chancellor that she would do so."

The dispatch then speaks of her endeavours from

her first coming to Russia to gain the confidence and affection of its people, by the study of their language and in conforming to their habits. Her person was advantageous, her manner captivating, and she had a great knowledge of the empire. She also had resolution and sense. "She has of late declared herself openly to me with respect to the King of Prussia," continues Sir Charles. "She told me recently, in speaking of the Prince of Prussia, that he had not his Prussian Majesty's understanding, but as to his heart it could not be so bad as his brother's, because the King of Prussia's was certainly the worst in the world. Her Imperial Highness never mentions the King (George II.) but with the utmost respect and the highest regard. She is thoroughly sensible of the utility of the union between Great Britain and Russia, and always calls his Majesty the Empress's best and greatest ally, and flatters herself that the King will also give his friendship and protection to the Grand Duke and herself. As to the Grand Duke, he is weak and violent, but his confidence in the Grand Duchess is so great that sometimes he tells people that though he does not understand things himself, yet his wife understands everything. From all I hear and can discover I have no doubt but that in case of the Empress's death, the succession would take place very quietly ; and I am sorry to say that I fear very much that this succession may take place very soon."

Then comes a final paragraph that, although the writer was wholly unconscious of it, touched on an intrigue which was destined to undermine all his labours, and to introduce to the Russian court one of the most remarkable, most romantic figures of the eighteenth century. The paragraph merely stated, "A Mr. Douglas arriving here from Paris, the suspicious Austrian Ambassador asked him what he meant to do in this country? He answered, 'I am come by the advice of my physician for the benefit of a cold climate.'" In reality, Douglas was present at St. Petersburg on a secret mission from the French Court. Since the expulsion from Russia eleven years previously of the Marquis de La Chétardie, Louis XV. had not been represented at the Court of Elizabeth. This was a source of regret to both sovereigns, for she regarded with sympathy a man who shared many of her characteristics, and whose consort she might have been had her father's wishes been carried out. That she desired to renew her friendship, her correspondence, and her diplomatic relations with him, even at a moment when she had signed a treaty that if ratified would oblige her army in case of war to oppose his, was owing to the fact that the young favourite, Ivan Ivanovitch, had an unbounded admiration for France, from where he obtained his furniture, his costumes, and his literature, whose language he spoke with fluency and whose manners he largely adopted.

Although he did not meddle in politics himself, this predilection of his was used by his wily and unscrupulous uncles, Peter and Alexander Schouvaloff, to favour an alliance between France and Russia in opposition to Bestuzhev, whom they hated, envied, and had resolved to overthrow.

That the Great Chancellor, the English and Austrian Ambassadors, and others interested in keeping her apart from France, might be left unaware of her actions and intentions, the Empress, according to papers preserved in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères, sent a private and unofficial message through a French banker named Michel, who had settled in St. Petersburg, and who had considerable intercourse with its Court, to Louis XV., stating that she wished the past to be forgotten, and desired to have a renewal of diplomatic intercourse between his Court and her own. Political reasons prevented his Majesty from acting on this hint at once, but eventually there appeared in the Russian capital a Frenchman styling himself the Chevalier de Valcroissant, whose mission it was to ascertain the feelings of the Court towards the French monarch. What these were on the part of Bestuzhev was soon made known, for pretending to regard him as a spy, the Chevalier was arrested and clapped into the fortress of Schlüsselburg on Lake Ladoga, a proceeding against which France was unable to protest as Valcroissant was not an accredited agent,

and her King was unwilling to show an interest in his fate that might arouse suspicions of his mission.

A little while later a fresh effort was made to establish friendly relations in a private manner between the courts, and for this purpose two young men were selected whose social position could rouse no suspicion. The first of these was a Scotchman whose real name was Mackenzie, who dressed in Highland costume styled himself the Chevalier Douglas, laid claim to noble if not Royal descent, and explained that his exile in France was due to his adherence and loyalty to the dethroned Stuarts. This picturesque narrative in reality concealed the fact that he had been a spy in the pay of Holland. His introduction to M. Rouillé, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, was made through the Prince de Conti, a Bourbon and a relative of his Majesty. Now living in Paris at the Temple, the Prince delighted to gather round him men distinguished in literature, politics, or art. From among these was also drawn the second individual, who was selected to undertake the private mission to Russia. This was Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timotheé D'Eon de Beaumont, the son of a Tonnerre lawyer, and the descendant of a good family. At the age of five and twenty this young man had proved his abilities by writing a pamphlet on the financial situation of France under Louis XIV., which gained him the post of Royal Censor and the friendship of the Prince de Conti.

In order that he might more effectually lull the suspicions of the Russian Court, and gain the ear of the Empress, it was decided that he should dress as a female, and as his appearance readily lent itself to such a disguise, there was little fear of his detection. Small in stature, slightly and gracefully built, his complexion was pink and white, his eyes large and blue, his lips pouting, and his expression gentle. A suavity of manner and sweetness of voice helped to complete his fitness for the part he was to play. That such a disguise was assumed and such a mission undertaken by him, is stated on such authorities as Gaillardet, *Mémoires sur la Chevalier D'Eon, d'après des documents authentiques*, Paris, 1866 ; and Boutaric, *Archiviste aux Archives de l'Empire : Correspondance secrète inédite de Louis XV. sur la Politique Etrangère*, Paris, 1866. At the same time Mr. Ernest Vizetelly throws doubt on the story in his admirable and painstaking work, *The True Story of the Chevalier D'Eon* ; while Captain Buchan Telfer, in his interesting volume, *The Strange Career of the Chevalier D'Eon*, regards it as probable.

It is certain, however, that the Chevalier Douglas received his instructions from M. Rouillé, as a copy of them, dated June 1st, 1755, is preserved in the *Correspondance secrète de Louis XV.* Written in microscopic writing on thin paper, they were concealed in the false bottom of a tortoiseshell snuff-box, such a

hiding-place for a document which he should have to consult from time to time, and probably to produce as his authority to those it mentioned, being likely to escape attention in case he were searched. The instructions stated that as Louis XV. had not been represented by any ambassador, minister, or even consul for a long time past, the condition of the Russian Court was almost unknown to him, especially as the jealous despotism of its ministers prevented such correspondence as was usual in other countries. It was therefore thought desirable to dispatch a competent person who would give information as to the actions and events passing in it; but notwithstanding the friendship which the Empress entertained for his Majesty, and her partiality for the French nation, a Frenchman would be watched too closely by the Russian ministry to be of any service, so a subject of the King of Great Britain who would not excite suspicion was selected. Douglas was to leave France as quietly as possible, to assume the air of a gentleman travelling for his health and pleasure, and was not to appear to have any relation with his Majesty's ministers whether in France or in the course of his travels. He was to avoid the great Courts, to enter Germany through Sweden, and to pass into Bohemia under the pretext of visiting its mines. On reaching St. Petersburg he was to make the acquaintance of those who could support his negotiations, he was to observe the

After a painting by Angelica Kaufmann.

THE CHEVALIER D'EON.
A portrait of this notorious adventurer in female attire.

influence exercised by Bestuzhev, by Woronzoff, by the Schouvaloffs, by the Empress's favourites, "whether in affairs of state or in the pursuit of pleasure," with all that could be of interest to his Majesty's service or could gratify his curiosity. Above all he was not to risk sending any information in the ordinary way through the Russian post, but was to report the progress he made in figurative language previously agreed on, and forward his letters to private addresses given him.

As for D'Eon, it has been stated, though not on documentary evidence, that he was given a copy of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*, in the double boards of whose binding was a letter from the French King to the Empress, together with a cypher which she and her Vice-Chancellor Woronzoff were to use in corresponding with his Majesty. Douglas left Paris in advance of D'Eon, and halting at Anhalt, there awaited the appearance of one who passed as his charming niece, Mademoiselle Lia de Beaumont. On arriving at St. Petersburg they stayed at the house of the French banker Michel, who introduced D'Eon to the Vice-Chancellor, who in turn presented him privately to Elizabeth to whom he confessed the secret of his disguise. The Empress would not have been a woman if she had not overlooked a deception meant to win her regard; and not only was D'Eon forgiven, but he was appointed her reader, as the story goes.

We know for a fact, however, that affairs did not go well with Douglas. Always audacious, he had lost no time in waiting on the British Ambassador, announced himself as a relative of the Earl of Morton, declared he was travelling for the benefit of his health, and asked that he might be presented to her Imperial Majesty. As Sir Charles had never seen or heard of him before, and as he was suspicious of his visitor, he refused his request. Nothing daunted Douglas called on Funcke, the Swedish Ambassador, who was known to favour France, and made a similar request to him. Before complying with it, Funcke thought it advisable to ask Sir Charles if he would object to such an act, when he was plainly told that the presentation of a British subject was no business of his. But though Douglas could not gain an audience with the Czarina, he was quite determined to establish some communication with her, and for this purpose the obliging banker introduced him to Count Woronzoff.

His declarations as to the desire of the King of France to establish friendly relations with the Empress were repeated to her by the Vice-Chancellor, who eventually gave him a written statement in which she expressed a willingness to receive and to obtain "respectful treatment for any Envoy of the King of France who would bring with him sufficient powers to sign a treaty."

With this desirable expression of the Imperial will in his possession, Douglas quitted the Russian capital and hurried back to France, leaving D'Eon to promote still further the friendliness which her Majesty felt towards Louis, commonly called the Well-Beloved. Refusing the offer she made him to enter her service, D'Eon returned to Paris some months later. It was probably owing to the secret influence in favour of France, brought to bear on her by these individuals as well as by the young favourite, that led to the convention, which was to have been ratified in October 1755, being neglected. For months it remained untouched upon her Majesty's table, "and I am sorry to say," writes Williams to Lord Holderness, "that she keeps the two Chancellors in such awe, that they are not upon a foot of putting her Majesty in mind of signing a paper."

In the interval, the King of Prussia, greatly alarmed at the prospect of Russian troops entering Germany, had suddenly broken off his relations with his old ally France, and secretly approaching England had offered to defend Hanover against all who threatened the electorate, and to enter into a defensive treaty with Great Britain. This was gladly accepted by George II., who promptly signed it at Westminster on January 16th, 1756. Early in the following month news of this act was communicated by Williams to the Great Chancellor Bestuzhev, whose long-cherished

scheme to humble Frederick and to gain England as an ally for Russia received a crushing blow. Doubtless he knew, what research has since made public, that friendly relations between England and Russia had been begun when Philip and Mary wrote a letter still preserved in the archives of Moscow, to the Czar Ivan Vassilievitch, acknowledging the receipt of his permission to open a free trade throughout the Russian Empire; that this correspondence was continued by Queen Elizabeth, to whom Ivan Vassilievitch proposed marriage; that Charles I. sent troops under Colonel Saunderson to the assistance of the Czar Michael Feodorovitch against Ladislaus, King of Poland, and was furnished by the successor of that Czar with corn and money during the civil war; and that Charles II. had announced the execution of his father to the ruling sovereign of Russia, Alexis Michaelovitch, who thought that all monarchs should regard the cause of Charles I. as their own and punish the usurper. As it was, Bestuzhev, shaking his wily old head, declared the union between England and Prussia would be disagreeable news to her Imperial Majesty, on which Sir Charles who had been instructed to make the best of it, answered that such a treaty could offend nobody but France, except such as were inclined to be offended, and hoped that he, Bestuzhev, would do all in his power to prevent the Empress from misunderstanding the new alliance.

At that the Great Chancellor gave him a broad hint that he had not yet received the money England had promised him. Sir Charles assured him that he should certainly receive it; but in case he had need of it, and would heartily serve his Britannic Majesty in this treaty, and prevent any jealousies that other ministers might strive to stir up in the Empress, he would have the promised sum immediately advanced to him. At that Bestuzhev expressed himself willing to do all that could be desired of him. A few days later Williams himself met with a bitter disappointment for which he was wholly unprepared. The long-deferred ratification took place on February 4th, 1756, but added to it was a phrase stating that it should be valid only in case the King of Prussia attacked the dominions of his Majesty the King of Great Britain, or those of his allies. Although Sir Charles strongly protested against a clause that made his labours for months and his splendid bribes quite useless, he was obliged to accept it as it stood. A little later and the Czarina desired it should be declared null and void, because of her displeasure at the treaty between Prussia and England, at a time when she was hoping that the latter country, in connection with Austria, would take some steps to reduce the power of Frederick II., "which she was ready and desirous to do at all times." This declaration was so strongly opposed by Bestuzhev, that she reprimanded him for his warmth. It was also

opposed, though secretly, by the Grand Duchess, who told Williams she was greatly struck on first hearing of the treaty between England and Prussia, and flattered him by adding that since he had explained it to her, she had nothing to say against it, and was willing to do all in her power for the service of his British Majesty. Williams declared that she was not only beloved, but already feared, and that those who were upon the best footing with the Empress sought to make their court in an underhand way to her Imperial Highness. This was no doubt because it was considered that Elizabeth could not live long. Writing in April 1756, Sir Charles says her health was so far from being good that it made her anxious for quiet and peace. "She is grown very melancholy and lives a very retired life ; and where formerly she used to be every day abroad, either in a chair or on horseback, she has not been out of her house but once this whole winter."

The change in the relationship of the great Powers making it now more desirable than ever that France should be represented at the Russian Court, Douglas was once more sent to St. Petersburg, which he reached in April 1756, and was in such haste to present himself, that at nine o'clock on the evening of his arrival he waited on the Vice-Chancellor, to whom he handed a private letter from the Well-Beloved to her Imperial Majesty. Although the latter was far from

being pleased that the Chevalier Douglas should be sent to her Court as an unofficial agent instead of an accredited minister, she received him graciously. Later Douglas was handed a *mémoire* addressed to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, in which it was stated that it would be agreeable to her Imperial Majesty if the Chevalier Douglas were more fully authorised or accredited as Chargé d'Affaires, so as to render it possible for both sides to treat with greater authority on the matters included in his instructions and serve not only to the glory and to the mutual advantage of both courts, but also to their prompt reunion. It was also stated that, notwithstanding the insufficiency of the Chevalier's authorisation, he would be treated with distinction, and listened to with consideration as being a person sent to Russia on the part of his most Christian Majesty.

The Empress's request was promptly complied with, for in July the Chevalier Douglas was accredited Chargé d'Affaires to the Russian Court ; while D'Eon, who joined him, no longer in woman's apparel but in the handsome dress of a fashionable young man, was appointed Secretary of Legation. It is significant of the waning influence of the Great Chancellor in her Majesty's esteem and confidence that he knew nothing of Douglas being sent into Russia until the latter had reached the frontier town of Riga ; and it is also significant of his hatred of a French alliance with

Russia, and of his methods of dealing with his opponents, that while Douglas and D'Eon were staying with Michel, the house was attacked one night by armed ruffians who fired into the room occupied by these young men. It was not until many months later that this attempt on their lives was connected with Bestuzhev, among whose papers were found details of a plot to murder them. But before this discovery was made many startling events had occurred in the Court of Russia.

CHAPTER V

Catherine's intrigue with Poniatowski—He is ordered to quit Russia—The tactless conduct of an Italian greyhound—The Pole leaves and returns to Russia—A political duel—The Empress dislikes her devil of a nephew—Ivan is sent for by her Majesty—The Great Chancellor's design to place Catherine on the throne—Her cautious reply—She asks money from the English Ambassador—The scent of English gold—Frederick of Prussia threatens the Empress—Russia prepares for war—Field-Marshal Apraxine becomes the plaything of intriguers—The new French Ambassador—Sir Charles Hanbury Williams is recalled—Receives a letter from Catherine—His melancholy end—The Grand Duchess is more carefully watched—The surreptitious manner in which she receives her friends—Peter's infatuation for a squinting Princess—A picture of Russian society as seen by a Dutchman—Serious condition of Elizabeth—Confusion of the Court—The Grand Duchess sees two paths before her—She gives birth to a daughter—The Grand Duke's appearance at her bedside—She is abandoned like any poor wretch—The downfall of Apraxine—The consequence to the Chancellor and to Catherine—Her foresight, courage, and determination—She writes to the Empress—A statement of her defence—She awaits an interview with the Czarina.

WHILE the Court was seething with political intrigues, their Imperial Highnesses occupied themselves after their usual fashion. Owing to the constant illness of Elizabeth, and the probability that Catherine would soon be in a position to punish those

who had thwarted her, the watchfulness of her guardians became greatly relaxed ; nay, her own belief in her near approach to power emboldened her to laugh at and make fun of them to their faces. Her opportunities for meeting the handsome young Pole were now frequent and scarce concealed, and were least of all interfered with by her husband, who was now engaged in making love to Madame Teploff, a niece of the Razumovskys. On his part Peter made no effort to hide this intrigue from his wife, whom he consulted on the best means of making his room attractive by the arrangement of muskets, grenadier caps, shoulder-belts, and helmets, when he expected a visit from the object of his affections. This devotion continued on his part through the winter, but when summer arrived and his unwashed presence became intolerable, Madame Teploff made excuses for not seeing him. However, to humour his Imperial Highness she declared that he must write to her twice a week from Oranienbaum where he then was, and set an example by penning him a letter of four pages. No sooner had he received this than he took it to the Grand Duchess, saying, " Only fancy, she writes me a letter of four whole pages and expects that I should read it, and what is more answer it also ; I who have to go to parade, then dine, then shoot, then attend the rehearsal of an opera, and the ballet which the cadets will dance. I will tell her plainly that I

have no time, and if she is vexed I will quarrel with her till the winter."

The fascination of the Grand Duchess for Poniatowski soon became so obvious that, tolerant as the Empress was of conduct in which she had shown an example, she gave orders that he should quit Russia. Catherine was not so overwhelmed with grief at this Imperial command as might have been expected, as she foresaw a means by which he might be restored to her, despite the Empress's wishes. Before his departure for Poland, he paid a farewell visit to their Imperial Highnesses at Oranienbaum, accompanied by his friend Count Horn, a Swede. Their stay at this country place was to extend over two days, on the first of which Peter treated them fairly well, but on the second he was considerate enough to leave them that he might attend the wedding of one of his huntsmen, which was to be celebrated by a great drinking bout. While the visitors were being led one day into the private salon of Catherine, her little Italian greyhound, springing from a sofa began to bark furiously at Count Horn, but on seeing Poniatowski, he jumped on him almost wild with joy. At this the Swede smiled knowingly, and when the Grand Duchess left them for a moment he turned to Poniatowski, saying, "My friend, there is nothing so terrible as a little Italian greyhound. The first thing I always do with the ladies I am in love with is to give them one of these

little dogs, and by this means I can always discover whether there is any one more favoured than myself. The rule is infallible. You see it. The dog growled as if he would have eaten me because I am a stranger, while he was mad with joy when he saw you again, for most assuredly this is not the first time he has seen you there." Poniatowski attempted to treat this as a joke, but his friend assured him he had nothing to fear from a man so discreet as himself.

No sooner had Poniatowski left Russia than Catherine put her plan in action by begging the Great Chancellor to use his influence with the Polish Prime Minister, Count Bruhl, to have him sent back to St. Petersburg as Minister Plenipotentiary of his country. Though this was strongly opposed from political reasons by the Ambassadors of France and Austria, Bestuzhev gained his way, and Poniatowski in the character of an accredited Minister was back in St. Petersburg in January 1757. In communicating this fact to Lord Holderness, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams adds that no one is on a better footing with the Great Chancellor than Poniatowski, "for reasons which I shall tell the King when I have the honour to cast myself at his Royal feet."

As may be judged from the opposition to his appointment as Minister by France and Austria, Poniatowski had begun to combine the arts of a diplomatist with the ardour of a lover. The protégé

of the English Ambassador, he shared his sympathies and prejudices. Though Sir Charles had come to Russia to negotiate for an army that would oppose Prussia under provocation, now that the latter country had become an ally of England it won his enthusiastic support. This extended so far as to induce him to offer his diplomatic services to Frederick II., who for some seven years had not been represented at the Russian Court ; to supply his Majesty with news of all that passed in St. Petersburg ; and to open up a correspondence between him and the Grand Duke. Easily imposed on, willing to believe every statement that favoured his plans, and to flatter himself on his powers of persuasion, he had already, though unconsciously, deceived the English Cabinet regarding the feelings of Russia, and was now in a similar manner about to give an equally false view of them to the Prussian monarch. Among other errors Frederick was led to believe that Williams was high in the favour and confidence of Elizabeth ; and that the influence others exercised over her in favour of Austria was of little or no importance.

No sooner had the Prussian King broken with his old ally France, than that country made friendly approaches to her former enemy Austria, which resulted not only in a reconciliation, but in an offensive and defensive alliance, which was signed May 1st, 1756. That these two Powers should ally themselves

to Russia, in opposition to England and Prussia, became the terror of Frederick's life ; and to prevent such a union Bestuzhev, the Grand Duchess, Poniatowski, and Williams were leagued against Woronzoff, the Schouvaloffs, Douglas, and D'Eon.

The Court was at the same time divided on another subject more important, and far graver than any treaty or alliance could be to the empire. Owing to the convulsive fits and consequent weak state of Elizabeth's health, the serious question as to who should succeed her came before all eyes, including her own. Though Peter had been publicly declared her heir, it was felt that as a fool and a sot he was unsuited to reign as supreme sovereign over this vast realm. He himself was not unaware of this, for he had frequently declared to his wife that he was not born for Russia, that he did not suit the Russians nor they him, and that he was persuaded he should perish in that country. Though he had been named as her successor by the Empress, her all-powerful will could at any moment set him aside in favour of another ; and she had now come to dislike and to despise " her devil of a nephew " so much that she could not endure his presence for more than fifteen minutes at a time ; while when she spoke of him in private, she either cried over his disreputable habits or roundly cursed him and wished him at the devil.

It was probably with the intention of setting him

aside in favour of Ivan, whom she had deposed and banished, that in the winter of 1756 she had, as we learn from a dispatch of the Dutch Ambassador Du Swart, as quoted in Raumer's *Contributions to Modern History*, caused that unfortunate youth to be brought to St. Petersburg and lodged in the house of the widow of a secretary of the secret police, whence he was quietly brought to the Winter Palace, where she saw him. Du Swart adds that it is doubtful whether the Grand Duke or Ivan should ascend the throne, the Ambassador being unaware that the latter had then given signs of mental weakness. It is probable that when convinced of the truth of a report to that effect that had reached her, Elizabeth turned in another direction for an heir to the crown, for it now became suspected that she intended to name Catherine's son the little Grand Duke Paul, as her successor. A fuller colour was given to the supposition from the fact that having issued orders that the guards should fill the theatre one day, she had on entering the Imperial box held the child aloft in her arms, as if presenting him to those who had made and unmade the rulers of Russia.

But the individual who looked forward most keenly to a change of sovereigns was the crafty Great Chancellor. Aware that the Grand Duke hated him, and that his services to the Grand Duchess had secured her favour, he secretly entered into a plan by which on Elizabeth's death, Catherine should be proclaimed

an equal participator in the administration with Peter, and rule co-jointly with him, while almost absolute power would be secured to himself, by his receiving the lieutenant-colonelcy of the four regiments of guards, and the presidency of the College of Foreign Affairs, of War, and of the Admiralty. Plans for carrying out this scheme were drawn up by him and forwarded to the Grand Duchess by their common friend Poniatowski, who shared the secret. But if Bestuzhev was wily, Catherine was wise, and not daring to commit herself to writing, she returned him a verbal answer thanking him for his good intentions but saying his plans were difficult to carry out. He then rewrote his scheme, altered it, amplified it, and became quite absorbed in adding to and changing its details. "To speak the truth," says the sagacious Catherine, "I looked upon it as the effect of mere dotage, and as a bait which the old man was throwing out in order to obtain a firmer hold on my friendship; but I did not catch at this bait, because I regarded it as prejudicial to the empire that every quarrel between my husband, who did not love me, and myself, should convulse the state; but as the occasion for such a course did not yet exist, I did not wish to oppose an old man who when once he took a thing into his head, was self-willed and immovable."

Meantime the friendly feelings of the Empress towards France were strengthening daily, and were no

longer so secret as to prevent Williams from seeing their tendency. In July 1756 he speaks in his dispatch of the corrupt persons that engross the Empress's ear, and is able to state that orders have been sent to all the Russian ministers to live upon good terms with the French. He added that Bestuzhev had declared it was the misfortune of Russia to have a young favourite at the Court who could talk French, was fond of the French and their fashions, and wanted to see a French embassy with a large train arrive at St. Petersburg. It was lamented that "his power is so great that there is sometimes no resisting it."

Williams, however, felt some comfort in what he calls the entire attachment of the Grand Duchess to the King of England. The probability of her soon mounting the throne, and the certainty of her acting perfectly right when she gains that exalted position, makes every word she says of consequence, says Sir Charles; who adds that she is very uneasy about the reports of a treaty between Russia and France, and offered to do everything he could suggest to prevent it. In return he drew her attention to the danger which an alliance with France would be to her and her husband, as without the aid of that country her enemies the Schouvaloffs would not be powerful enough to set Peter aside in favour of the infant Grand Duke. One can imagine with what meekness and attention his babble was listened to by one who

had fifty times more sense and cunning. He states that she thanked him ten times over for his hints, declared she saw the danger he pointed out, and that she "would animate the Grand Duke" to oppose a French alliance. Then as a result of her entire attachment to the King of England, and her implicit confidence in the wisdom of his Ambassador, came a request. She could do a great deal if she had money, indeed nothing could be done without it: she was forced to keep even the Empress's chambermaids in pay, and she had no one to address herself to but the King, whom she hoped would graciously lend her twenty thousand ducats, for which she was ready to give a note of hand, and to repay the moment it was in her power to do so. She gave her word that every farthing of this would be spent in what she hoped might be their joint service. This sum amounting to about ten thousand pounds English money, was lent her on the 8th of the following month.

The scent of English gold in the air was sufficiently strong to affect and apparently to change the principles of the Vice-Chancellor Woronzoff, who sent Sir Charles word that everything in the past must be forgotten, and that things in the present were not so bad that they could not be remedied, presumably for a handsome consideration. Indeed hints to that effect went so far, that Sir Charles was informed that the house Woronzoff was building had been begun with English

money, and that English money must finish it. To that the British Ambassador answered that Woronzoff must give some proof of his sincerity before he could enter into any treaty with him ; when Sir Charles was told that if he did not give money other people would, and that the Chevalier Douglas had already presented a great deal to several persons ; but to this Williams replied he neither would nor could say more than he had already said.

As the political situation of Europe at this period can be referred to only in so far as it concerns the social events of the Court of Russia, it will be sufficient to say that in August 1756 Frederick II. of Prussia, by way of anticipating his enemies, as he explained, began the Seven Years' War, by marching his troops through Saxony that he might attack Bohemia, then part of the dominions of Maria Theresa of Austria. The Court of St. Petersburg was now in a state of ferment as to what steps Elizabeth would take. In a dispatch of September 14th, 1756, Williams expresses himself as "thoroughly convinced" that no offensive alliance existed between Austria and Russia, as Frederick supposed. If, however, the Czarina entered into an alliance with France, she would be obliged to protect the ally of that country. The faction for and against this alliance grew more active, more determined daily ; the hopes and fears of each fluctuating with the changes in the health of the Czarina, who now more than ever

suffered from convulsive fits, and who it was believed could not live many months.

In order to strengthen the party in his favour, Frederick, at the suggestion of the British Ambassador, consented to bribe Bestuzhev with the offer of one hundred thousand dollars. On September 28th, Sir Charles in writing to Prussia, states that he strove to gain the goodwill of the Great Chancellor for the monarch whom he hated, but had at first found him inflexible. But the broader the hints as to the amount of the sum which would reward his friendship for Frederick, the more Bestuzhev yielded. Eventually his avarice could not withstand temptation, and giving Williams his hand, he declared that from that hour he was his Majesty's friend, although he was careful to add he did not know how he could serve him at present, as he thought nothing could hinder the Empress from assisting Austria. The King of Prussia however might be assured that he would willingly serve him ; but the old fox hoped his sudden change of opinion regarding that monarch might be kept a great secret.

On the other hand, the French King had increased the ardour of the Vice-Chancellor's support of his cause, by sending him some old furniture his Majesty had bought at a high price from his mistress the Pompadour, who had grown tired of it, but which it was considered would admirably suit the new house

which Woronzoff had built for himself at St. Petersburg. No doubt in accepting Frederick's bribe Bestuzhev had before his eyes the expected demise of his sovereign and the worship which her successor manifested for the Prussian monarch. Did the Great Chancellor continue to oppose Frederick up to the time when Peter came to the throne, then either exile or the block would be his fate, from which even the Grand Duchess might not be able to save him. The same sage reflections must have haunted the Schouvaloffs, for as it became more and more evident that Elizabeth intended to enter into an alliance with France, they who were largely responsible for influencing her Majesty in this direction, sent a message to the Grand Duchess, as Williams was told by her, expressing their regret that such an alliance was displeasing to the Grand Duke and herself. "They offer me to become entirely mine," she said, "to put me on the best footing with the Empress, and to procure me everything that can be agreeable to me during her lifetime, if I will promise them my future protection, and adopt and protect their system of politics. My answer was that as far as I meddled in politics, I entirely disapproved of their system, that I had always been for the English alliance and against the French, though my opinion in those affairs had not much weight. Yet I would be sincere enough with them to assure them that the Grand Duke would not

only never adopt that system, but whenever it was in his power would severely punish the author of it."

Meanwhile under orders from the Czarina, her army began to prepare for war, hearing which Frederick threatened her that if she declared against him, he would march into Russia and replace Ivan on the throne. To this Elizabeth answered that the day he attempted to do so she would have Ivan's head cut off. The command of the Russian army which was preparing itself to attack Frederick, was given to a man singularly unfitted for the post. This was Stephen Apraxine, who though he had seen but little service, had just been made a field-marshal. Fair and fat, he was a clumsily built, foolish, good-natured man, extravagant in his habits, a dandy in his tastes, a boon companion who could drink with the best, lazy, luxurious, an ardent and fickle lover, and a rank coward, for says Williams, "he was grossly abused the other day and almost kicked by Count Cyril Razumovsky without resenting it." Like most amiable and unwise persons, he made many friends; for he was not only in favour with the Empress and the Schouvaloffs, but with their Imperial Highnesses and Bestuzhev; in striving to please all of whom he came to grief.

From the first the Commander-in-Chief hesitated between the contending factions; for though ordered in September 1756, by the Empress to join the

forces then massed at the frontier, a sudden turn for the worse in her health made it possible for him to please Peter, who was furious at the idea of his hero being attacked, by delaying his departure on the plea that the army was not yet in a condition to fight. The Great Chancellor, probably eager to show that he had earned his bribe, assured Williams it was he who had contrived this delay, and that he would manage many more in order to serve the King of Prussia. The temporary recovery of Elizabeth in October, and her interview with Apraxine, resulted in his departure early in the following month for Riga, whence he sent an aide-de-camp to St. Petersburg to fetch twelve suits of clothes, "which looks," says Sir Charles, "as if he wished to make his campaign among the ladies." The same authority states that it was believed Apraxine did not wish to meet the Prussians, and that he was very extravagant and very needy notwithstanding the great bounties bestowed on him by the Empress; and continuing, says: "From these circumstances the King of Prussia thinks it may be worth while, in the present conjuncture, to give him a sum of money in order to delay the march of the troops, which a Commander-in-Chief can easily find pretences to do. The Grand Duchess must be the person employed, if she will undertake it."

While these intrigues to delay or to prevent Frederick from being attacked were taking place, the

intriguers received a blow on learning that her Imperial Majesty had signed a treaty with France on December 31st, 1756, which bound her to join forces with that country against Prussia. When after some changes had been made in the secret clauses, it was ratified, its conveyance was entrusted to D'Eon, who before his departure from St. Petersburg received three hundred ducats from the Empress as a mark of her favour to him, and at the same time she handed him letters from herself to the Empress of Austria and the King of France which assured those monarchs not only of her friendliness but that the treaty of subsidies with Great Britain was no longer of effect, and that henceforth her army would act in concert with the forces of Austria and France. Finally D'Eon was the bearer from her of a commission to Voltaire to write the life of her father Peter the Great, in payment for which she sent him fifty thousand livres, a sum equivalent to two thousand pounds English money.

To mark its appreciation of the growing favour extended to it by the Russian Court, France had in September 1756 appointed as its Ambassador there the Marquis L'Hôpital, a man of gracious manner, of dignified bearing, a diplomat of experience, and a lover of splendour. He did not however arrive in St. Petersburg until June 1757, when he was attended by a magnificent suite that

included the Marquis de Bermond, the Marquis de Fougères, Baron de Wittenghoff, and Count Frottier de la Messelière, together with secretaries, equerries, and valets to the number of eighty. That France should send her so courtly a plenipotentiary delighted Elizabeth, who desiring to make the most favourable impression on him, arranged that their first meeting should take place at a brilliant Court ball. That this impression was all she could have desired is evident from an early dispatch of his in which, after speaking of her costly and imposing costume, he says: "Her powder, her large hoop-petticoats, her diadem of precious stones, and the splendour of her dress, enhanced the nobility of her carriage and the natural charm of her features." Conversing in French with him she expressed the pleasure it gave her to see an Ambassador of his most Christian Majesty at her Court, and her extreme friendliness towards him.

Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, who had fallen into disfavour with Elizabeth because of his partisanship with Frederick II., and of the court which he paid to Catherine, and who had also incurred the displeasure of the English Cabinet for having allowed his sanguine temperament to mislead them, and permitted Russia to form an alliance with England's enemy, remained sufficiently long at St. Petersburg to witness the French Ambassador's friendly reception. Though

recalled some months previously, he remained on one pretext or another in the capital until August 19th, 1757. The humiliation and consequent depression he suffered found some relief in a letter he received from the Grand Duchess just before his departure. In this she said that as she could not see him to bid him farewell, she had resolved to write to him; that her sincere regrets would accompany him whom she regarded as one of the best of her friends, and whose conduct had gained her esteem. It may have been in reference to Poniatowski, that she told Sir Charles she would never forget the obligations she owed him. "To recompense you in a manner conformable to the nobleness of your sentiments," she continues, "I will show you what I will do; I will seize every occasion imaginable to bring back Russia to that which I recognise as its true interest—that is, to be intimately united to England." She concludes by telling him that one of the things she most wished for was to see him return in triumph, and she trusted that the King his master, would not refuse her the favour she would ask, to let her see him, Sir Charles, again.

This hope of hers, it may be stated here, was never fulfilled. Always excitable, it had recently been considered that his mind had given way under his disappointments. This supposition became a certainty a little later, for on his way home he was entrapped at Hamburg by "a wretched female," with whom

he went through a ceremony of marriage, though his wife was living, and to whom he gave bonds for a large sum. On his reaching England he was taken charge of by his relatives and gained a partial recovery, which however was followed by a state of relapse into insanity, in which condition he committed suicide on November 2nd, 1759, while at his residence, Coldbrook Park, near Abergavenny.

Threatening though the political situation was, it did not prevent the Russian Court from continuing its round of gaieties, in which balls, receptions, hunting parties, attendance at plays and operas, followed each other in quick succession. While at Oranienbaum in the summer, the Grand Duke increased his Holstein troops by numbers of adventurers who offered him their service, and in a feverish desire for excitement constantly gave entertainments to which were admitted the female singers and ballet girls of his opera, together with a number of women of more than doubtful character who had been brought to him from St. Petersburg. It was also his desire that his wife should attend these dances and festivities, but she refused to be present on the grounds that the Empress would be displeased if she appeared in so mixed a company. Her prudence was therefore rewarded by her being allowed to take her meals, and to remain in her own rooms, "with two or three persons."

On returning to the capital her liberty was more

curtailed, as she was lodged in a wing of the Imperial Palace, and a stricter watch was exercised over her. But the Grand Duchess was a woman of many resources who could baffle if she could not win her warders. As an example of her ingenuity she mentions in her Memoirs the manner in which she contrived to entertain her friends unknown to those around her. At a time when she was laid up she had a little boudoir constructed in her room close beside her bed, but carefully concealed by screens and curtains from the rest of the apartment, so that those who entered it were not seen by those who might be hidden in the boudoir, whose entertaining company she might enjoy by withdrawing the curtains at one side of her bed. Among the intimate friends who visited her here were Leon and his sister-in-law, and Poniatowski, who came disguised in a light wig and a cloak, and who when challenged by the sentries used to describe himself as a musician of the Grand Duke.

One evening when there was a festivity at Court, the Grand Duchess, being weary, said she would retire early, but just as she was enjoying the society of her little party, Count Peter Schouvaloff, presumably on the plea of showing her a plan of the fireworks to be let off for the entertainment of the Court, but doubtless to see what was going on in her apartments, suddenly presented himself at their door. Her lady-in-waiting, Madame Vladislava, told him she feared her Imperial

Highness was asleep, but would see if she would receive him. On hearing a knock at her door, Catherine quickly drew the curtains dividing her friends from herself before she gave admittance to Madame Vladislava, who whatever her suspicions had no knowledge of what was going on. On Catherine consenting to see Peter Schouvaloff, those in hiding could scarcely smother their laughter at the idea that one of the most important personages at Court, who possessed the confidence of the Empress, would be able to swear that he found the Grand Duchess in bed and alone, while within a few yards of him were a merry company of mockers. No sooner was he admitted than Catherine rubbing her eyes as if just waked from sleep, apologised for keeping him waiting, examined the plans he showed her and entered into a conversation with him which she continued until he became anxious to leave, lest he might keep her Majesty waiting. No sooner had he gone than declaring she was starving, she ordered six good dishes for her supper, and had them placed beside her bed by the servants whom she then dismissed. When she drew back the curtains her friends came forward and fell upon the food and wine like so many famished creatures, laughing and joking the while, and passed an evening whose enjoyment was immensely increased by the danger and mystery that attended it.

The Grand Duke was at this time taken up by his

attentions to the Countess Elizabeth Woronzoff, niece of the Vice-Chancellor, and daughter of Count Roman Woronzoff. Both he and his family were at one time detested by Peter, of whom they spoke in return with scant reserve or respect; the Count among other things saying he could easily convert the Grand Duke's antipathy into friendship, and win the highest favour for himself and his daughter, by presenting his Imperial Highness with six bottles of English beer. When this was repeated to Peter by his wife he was furious, but his wrath was eventually turned aside and his affections won, partly by the beer, but also by Elizabeth, a young woman whose coarse face was deeply pitted by smallpox, who could swear and drink and scold like a shrew, who squinted horribly, and who spat out continually while she talked. In derision she was named La Pompadour by the Empress.

It is little wonder that the Dutch Ambassador Du Swart considered that Russian society presented a frightful picture of licentiousness and disorder. Writing in October 1757, he says that the Empress sees and hears no one but the Schouvaloffs, that she inquires into nothing, but proceeds in her old course of life and has literally given up the empire to be pillaged by everybody. The whole country was in a disorderly, dangerous, and lamentable condition, for there was not the slightest trace left of good faith, honour, confidence, shame, or equity. "Nothing," he continues,

"is seen but boundless vanity and prodigality, which leads to ruin. The old families and the common people are oppressed in the most cruel manner by upstarts. The children of the most distinguished houses are compelled to marry persons of the meanest origin who happen to be in favour. The Empress is aware of the machinations and amours of Catherine and Poniatowski; she entertains for her and the Grand Duke the most sovereign contempt; and the nation detests the latter more and more every day."

Disreputable and disorganised as the Russian Court was when these lines were written, it was soon afterwards to descend a stage lower by occurrences that revealed intrigues and brought down the highest minister in the empire. In April 1757, Apraxine, after many delays began to attack the Prussian troops with a success that continued till his victory in August of Gross-Jagersdorff, when instead of following up his triumph, crushing Frederick's army, and ending the war, he suddenly beat a retreat with a haste that resembled flight. Not only that, but on the plea of unwillingness to expose his exhausted troops to further hardships, he withdrew them towards the Russian frontier, and looked peacefully on while the allies and friends of the country were being attacked by Prussia. This step which brought on him the contempt and curses of his men, was heard of with shame and surprise at

St. Petersburg, and with indignation by France and Austria. To all it seemed to be capable but of one explanation. At this time the Empress was more frequently than before attacked with convulsive fits that not only exhausted her strength but impaired her faculties, so that after each attack she remained for some days in a state of lethargy during which she could not be spoken to on any subject. News of all that passed at Court was communicated to Apraxine, who was on the friendliest terms with their Imperial Highnesses and with the Great Chancellor, and who knew that in case of her Majesty's death the war against Frederick would be ended by Peter to whom it was abhorrent.

No sooner had Apraxine made this inexcusable retreat, than he must have congratulated himself on his action, for never before had the Empress been so near death as in the early part of September. On the 8th of that month, a feast day, she went from the palace of Tsarskoe Selo to the adjoining parish church to hear Mass. She had scarcely entered when she was seized by a feeling of faintness and suffocation, and to gain the open air she rose and left unattended by her suite. Before she had gone many yards she swayed and fell insensible on the grass plot she was crossing. A crowd of peasants who had been going to Mass immediately gathered round her, without daring to touch so august a personage. Some of

them running into the church summoned her ladies-in-waiting, who found her rigid as death. Doctors and surgeons were sent for in haste, when bleeding, then the remedy for all evils, was resorted to without restoring consciousness. As the doctors dared not move her, a couch and some screens were brought from the palace, when she was placed on the former, and protected from the curious stare of the crowd by the latter. Remedies were then applied, but it was not until about two hours had passed that she began to recover, though at first she did not recognise those around her, nor was her speech intelligible.

The whole Court was thrown into a state of wild excitement over an event that was regarded as the herald of her death, fear and hope, regret and triumph swaying its opposite factions. Only the next morning was the news sent to the Grand Duchess, not by any official, but by the faithful Poniatowski. She immediately told Peter, who had heard nothing of it, all news of her Majesty's Court, and especially of her health, being kept from them; so that though sometimes hearing surreptitiously of her illnesses, they dared not send to make inquiries save at the permitted period of once a week, lest those who whispered the news might be instantly dismissed, disgraced, or even sent to Siberia. When the day fixed for them to ask after her health came round, they were told that during her swoon she had severely bitten her

tongue and for days she had not regained the free use of her speech.

Unfortunately for Apraxine she gradually recovered, and was sufficiently well by October 16th to order the Conference of Ministers, which since 1756 she had permitted to advise her on affairs of State, to command him to retrace his steps and retrieve his honour. Alarmed by the state of public feeling against the Commander-in-Chief, and seeing that the Empress was not about to die, Bestuzhev privately sent his friend and confidant, Privy Councillor Stamke, to the Grand Duchess, urging her to write and induce Apraxine to end a flight to which his enemies gave an odious and injurious interpretation, and to beg that he would obey the orders of the Government, as she here herself states in her Memoirs ; though the French Ambassador in one of his dispatches relates that the letter she was requested to write and did write, was to dispense Apraxine of his oath not to bring his army into action, and to give him permission to do so. That she did write, not one but three letters to the Commander-in-Chief, will presently be seen ; but before he could obey her Imperial Highness, the Empress, incensed at him for letting Frederick escape, and for playing her false to her allies, removed him from command of the army, ordered his papers to be seized and examined, and directed that he should be brought to St. Petersburg to be tried by court-martial. Owing to friends of his

at Court, these orders were not communicated to him for some time, and therefore were not soon complied with.

Meantime it became evident that the Grand Duchess was once more about to become a mother, much to the annoyance of Peter; for the Empress being too unwell at this time to attend Court ceremonies, the duty of appearing at them had fallen on him, but he preferring to remain with his intimate friends and his toy soldiers in his own apartments, had in turn shifted the duty on to his wife. As she was no longer able to preside over these ceremonies, at which he was therefore obliged to be present, he became irritated, and one day declared that God only knew how she came to be in that condition, and that he did not know whether or not to take the responsibility of the child. Leon, who heard him, came running with the news to Catherine, who was alarmed at this speech, but with her usual courage and audacity she sent him back to threaten poor Peter with Alexander Schouvaloff, the "grand inquisitor of the empire"; and on Leon faithfully reporting his message, the Grand Duke turned on him saying, "Go to the devil, and don't talk to me any more about it."

His injudicious words had more weight with his wife than he could have imagined. Thinking seriously over them, she saw two paths were open to her choice: either to share the fortunes of the Grand Duke and

be at his mercy, dependent on whatever he chose to do for or against her ; or to act entirely independently of him. In other words, she had as she writes, " to choose the alternative of perishing with him, or by him, or to save myself, my children, perhaps the empire also, from the wreck of which all the moral and physical qualities of this Prince made me foresee the danger. This last choice appeared to me the safest. I resolved therefore to the utmost of my power to continue to give him on all occasions the very best advice I could for his benefit, but never to persist in this, as I had hitherto done, so as to make him angry ; to open his eyes to his true interests on every opportunity that presented itself, and during the rest of the time to maintain a mournful silence ; and on the other hand to take care of my own interests with the public, so that in the time of need they might see in me the saviour of the commonwealth."

Between two and three in the morning of December 9th, 1757, the Grand Duchess sent her husband word that her child was about to be born, in order that he might announce that fact to the Empress. A little while later he strode into her room dressed in the Holstein uniform, booted and spurred, with a scarf round his thin twisted body and an enormous sword at his side. Astonished at this vision she asked him why he had donned this dress, when he told her that it was only in an emergency that true friends could

be known, that in that uniform he was ready to act as duty demanded, that the duty of a Holstein officer was to defend according to his oath the ducal palace against all its enemies, and that as she was ill he had hastened to her assistance. "One would have supposed him jesting, but not at all, he was quite serious," says she, adding, "I saw at once that he was intoxicated, and advised him to go to bed, that the Empress when she came might not have the double annoyance of seeing him in such a state, and armed *cap-à-pie* in the Holstein uniform, which I knew she detested." Only by considerable persuasion was he induced to retire, just as her Majesty entered. On her inquiries for him she was told he had that moment left and would soon return.

The newly-born child was a daughter whom Catherine desired to name after the Empress, but the Czarina preferred to have it called Anna, after her sister, the mother of the Grand Duke. Scarcely had the infant come into the world, when it was carried away by the Empress to her own apartments, while on the plea that she required repose, the Grand Duchess was "abandoned like any poor wretch, no one entering my room to ask how I was, or even sending to inquire." Some days later, however, the treasury being now better stocked than on a former occasion, she was sent a present of sixty thousand roubles, Peter receiving a similar sum, much to his

delight. Indeed he appeared greatly pleased by the birth of the child, made considerable rejoicings over it in his own apartments, and received all the compliments paid him on the occasion with much satisfaction. In speaking of this infant it only remains to be added that Poniatowski was generally believed to be its father, and that it survived only about twelve months.

It was close upon this same month of December before the Empress's command to surrender his post reached Apraxine. Never a brave man, he was now overwhelmed by fear, and on his way to the capital fell ill at Narva. To this place Alexander Schouvaloff, the head of the dreaded Secret Chancellery, was dispatched to examine him, in January 1758. To him Apraxine protested his innocence of all treasonable intentions ; swore he had not acted under the direction of their Imperial Highnesses, or under the inspiration of Prussian gold ; and declared he had been guided by the councils of war he had held with his brother officers.

Contrary to the expectations of the Schouvaloffs, and of the Austrian and French Ambassadors, his papers did not contain any letters that incriminated Bestuzhev or Catherine. For all that both were darkly suspected, and the enemies of the Great Chancellor determined to seize this occasion to ruin him. He himself unconsciously gave them a clue to the best means of proceeding against him. On hearing

that Apraxine had been arrested, Bestuzhev, lest he might be accused of influencing the actions of the fallen man, roundly denounced him in the council chamber; and later on to show how far the Grand Duchess was from approving of the disgraceful retreat, he showed Lieutenant-General Bucow a copy of the letter she had written to the Commander-in-Chief. Bucow mentioned this to Peter Schouvaloff, to the Vice-Chancellor Woronzoff, and to the Austrian and French Ambassadors. That the Great Chancellor had acknowledged that a correspondence was carried on between Apraxine and Catherine through his intervention, would be sufficient to incur the anger of the Czarina against all of them. If he could be arrested before his suspicions of such an intention were roused, it was hoped and believed that not only damnatory proof of his interference with Apraxine would be discovered among his papers, but also of his plot to interfere with the succession in favour of Catherine, which his friendship for her, his love of intrigue, and his desire of power led his enemies to believe him capable of.

Mention is made of the first step taken to overthrow him, in the dispatch of Sir Robert Keith, who succeeded Sir Charles Hanbury Williams as British Ambassador to the Court of St. Petersburg. In writing to Lord Holderness, Keith says that at a Court reception the French Ambassador having kissed her Majesty's hand,

pretended to admire her gown, while he whispered in her ear that there was a person at Court who was very dangerous both to her Majesty's person and government, and that he thought himself obliged in duty to tell her that the Great Chancellor was the man. Always dreading lest by some sudden *coup d'état*, such as had placed her on the throne, she might also be deposed by one whose activity and intelligence she had come to dread, the Empress summoned a Conference of Ministers for that evening. From this the Great Chancellor excused his attendance on the plea of being ill ; but her Majesty regarding this as an evasion of an examination which he feared, at once commanded his presence. No sooner had he obeyed than he was arrested, deprived of his offices, his titles, and his orders, and was sent back to his own house as a prisoner in the charge of a company of Grenadier Guards, who had orders to surround it and prevent any attempt he should make to escape.

This had been done so suddenly and so quietly that, though living in the palace and within a short distance of the apartment where his arrest had taken place, the Grand Duchess, whom it so much concerned, heard nothing of it until the following morning which happened to be Sunday, when Leon brought her a note from Poniatowski, in which he said, " Man is never without resources. I employ this means of informing you that last night Bestuzhev was arrested

After a picture by Le Brun.

STANISLAUS AUGUSTUS PONIATOWSKI,
Last King of Poland.

and deprived of his offices and dignities." On reading this Catherine was thunderstruck, for she at once saw how dangerous to herself this arrest might prove. With surprising fortitude she prepared to face events, and with the iron in her soul, as she expresses it, she dressed and went to Mass, where it seemed to her every one had faces as long as her own. No one spoke to her during that anxious day of the event which filled all with consternation, and with the exception of the Grand Duke who always disliked Bestuzhev, and who was now in excellent spirits, all were depressed and troubled. Left to herself Catherine prepared to play her part, which as might be expected, was not one that betrayed the terrible apprehensions she felt, not only at having written to Apraxine, but lest some traces might be found in Bestuzhev's papers of his scheme for giving her equal rights with Peter as a ruler of Russia, if not indeed supreme sovereignty. Could it be shown that she had countenanced these plans, or was in any way involved in them, there was little doubt that imprisonment for life in a fortress or convent would be her fate.

But until her danger became apparent, she determined to wear a brave front, and assume a light-hearted air of indifference to the arrest, such as might become the most innocent. It happened that on this Sunday evening Leon was to celebrate the marriage, which she had arranged for him, and whose house she

had helped to furnish. At the ball in the evening which followed the ceremony, and at which the Empress was not present, the Grand Duchess saw among the glittering crowd of courtiers the two men who had been appointed to inquire into the causes which had led to Bestuzhev's arrest. Smilingly approaching the first of these, who acted as marshal of the wedding, Prince Nikita Troubetzkoy, she whispered to him while pretending to examine the ribbons of his marshal's baton, "What do all these fine doings mean? Have you found more crimes than criminals, or more criminals than crimes?" Knowing of her friendship with the fallen Great Chancellor, and probably seeing beneath the mask of her gaiety, he reassured her by saying, "We have done as we were ordered, but as for crimes, they are yet to be discovered. So far the search has been unsuccessful." Her relief can be imagined, but eager to gauge the second of these investigators, Marshal Boutourline, she, while smiling and bowing and exchanging words with the throng, slowly drew near him. When close to him he said in a low voice, "Bestuzhev is arrested, but we have yet to learn why."

The assurances that no incriminating letters or papers had been found, must have secured her a sound night's sleep, and early in the morning more comforting tidings still were brought to her by Privy Councillor Stamke, who said he had just received a note from

Bestuzhev, begging him to tell her that she need be under no apprehension concerning what she knew, as he had had time to burn everything. He also said that he would communicate to her the drift of the questions asked him, probably that she might be prepared for those which might be put to herself. He had conveyed his note to Stamke through a musician in his service, but it was arranged that in future all communications should be placed in a particular spot among some bricks not far from his house. A few days later Stamke returned pale and frightened to say that Bestuzhev's correspondence with himself and with Poniatowski had been discovered, that the little musician had been arrested, and that he himself expected either to share the same fate or to be dismissed. As it happened he was spared an imprisonment on the condition that he returned without delay to his native Holstein, while the King of Poland was requested to recall his Minister, Count Poniatowski.

On hearing of this, Catherine collected all her papers, letters, and account books, and throwing them into the fire, called her valet de chambre, Skourine to see what she had done, telling him that if he were asked where they were, he would be able to swear he had seen her burn them. The older Schouvaloffs, who had been striving to nullify the influence which she had upon Peter, and to sow dissension between them, had succeeded in frightening him as to her

complicity in Bestuzhev's affairs, and as to the anger with which the Empress regarded her, so that he was almost afraid to speak to her, and avoided entering her apartments where she remained quite alone seeing no one, lest she might implicate them in her misfortunes.

Here she remained until towards the end of the carnival, when Poniatowski suggested that she should attend a Russian play which was to be performed at the Court theatre ; for every one, he said, had been wondering why she had recently absented herself from all festivities, that it gave colour to a rumour that she had been forbidden to do so, and was on the eve of being sent back to her own country. At this her spirit rose and she determined to make her appearance at the theatre, though she knew that Peter hated a Russian drama so much, that to talk of seeing one was enough to displease him, and that if she went, her ladies-in-waiting would be obliged to accompany her, when he would lose the society of one of them, Elizabeth Woronzoff, and would have no other resource but to drink.

She therefore sent word to Count Alexander Schouvaloff, desiring him to order a carriage for her as she was going to the play, to which that personage replied that it was not agreeable to the Grand Duke that she should do so. Her reply was, that as she formed no part of the society of his Imperial Highness, she

imagined it would be all the same to him whether she was in her own room or in her box at the theatre. These words were received with many winks and facial twitchings, but met with no answer. But presently Peter came into her room in a towering passion, his pitted face crimson, his voice screeching like an eagle, and declared that she went to these plays because she knew he disliked them, and that he would forbid her having a carriage. To that she said coolly enough, that if he did she would go on foot, and that she could not imagine what pleasure he found in compelling her to die of ennui in her rooms with no other company than her dog and her parrot. Their dispute ended in his quitting her in a greater rage than ever.

As she still persisted in going to the play, she sent, when it was near time to start, to know if the carriages were ready, and was told by Alexander Schouvaloff that the Grand Duke had forbidden any to be provided for her. Then those eyes which few could meet without flinching, flashed in anger, and she told him she would go on foot; that if he forbade the ladies and gentlemen of her suite from attending her, she would go alone, and besides that she would write and complain to the Empress of the Grand Duke and of him. When asked what she would say to her Majesty, she replied, "I will tell her the manner in which I am treated, and that you, in order to secure for the Grand

Duke a rendezvous with my maids-of-honour, encourage him to prevent my going to the theatre, where I might perhaps have the pleasure of seeing her Imperial Majesty ; and besides this I will beg of her to send me back to my mother, because I am weary of and disgusted with the part I play here, left alone and deserted in my room, hated by the Grand Duke, and not liked by the Empress. I want to be at rest and a burden to no one ; I want to be freed from the necessity of making every one who approaches me unhappy, and particularly my poor servants, of whom so many have been exiled because I was kind to them or wished to be so. It is thus that I shall write to her Imperial Majesty, and I will see moreover that you yourself will be the bearer of my letter."

At this outpouring of her wrath, Alexander Schouvaloff got frightened and quietly left her, when she sat down to keep her word and write her missive, making it as she states, as pathetic as she could. In this she repeated her complaints of being deprived "even of the most innocent amusements," and begged that she might be sent away, for as she was never allowed to see her children, though living under one roof with them, it made little difference to her whether she was in the same place with them or hundreds of leagues distant ; and that confident that the Empress took better care of them than it was in their mother's power to do,

she would pass the rest of her life with her relations, in praying for her Majesty, for the Grand Duke, and for all who had done her either good or evil. No one felt more sure that the request of this exemplary letter would not be complied with than the writer, who was well aware that the Czarina detested changes and troubles, and that she worshipped the little Grand Duke Paul, whom she feared would, if deprived of his mother's protection, be declared illegitimate and deprived of the succession when his father came to the throne.

When the Grand Duchess had finished her task she summoned Alexander Schouvaloff, who at once told her that the carriages were ready. In reply she handed him her letter which he dared not refuse to deliver to the Czarina. At the same time Catherine told him that he might tell the ladies and gentlemen who did not wish to accompany her that she would dispense with their attendance. As she passed out through the ante-room she saw the Grand Duke playing cards in a corner with Elizabeth Woronzoff. As contrary to his usual custom he rose, she bowed and swept on elated at her victory. On her return from the theatre, where her Majesty had not been present, she was told by Alexander Schouvaloff that the Empress would grant her an interview. At that she was delighted, for she believed that a personal encounter would result in her triumph, and she was

gratified to think that if her enemies the Schouvaloffs had any intention of sending her home, or of frightening her with a threat of doing so, she had taken the best means of disconcerting their project by seeming to desire it herself. She also believed that in whatever position fate might place her, she would never be without the resources which talent and determination give to each individual according to his natural abilities, and she felt herself possessed of sufficient courage either to mount or to descend without being carried away by undue pride on the one hand, or feeling humbled or dispirited on the other. Though knowing that she was human and incapable of perfection, yet her intentions had, she states, always been good, and continuing she says, " If from the very beginning I had perceived that to love a husband who was not amiable and who took no pains to be so was a difficult if not impossible thing, yet at least I had devoted myself both to him and to his interests with all the attachment which a friend and even a servant could devote to his friend and master. My counsel to him had always been the very best I could devise for his welfare, and if he did not choose to follow it, the fault was not mine, but that of his own judgment, which was neither sound nor just. When I came to Russia, and during the first years of our union, had he shown the least disposition to make himself supportable, my heart would have been open to him ; but when I saw that

of all possible objects I was the one to whom he showed the least attention, precisely because I was his wife, it is not wonderful I should find my position neither agreeable nor to my taste, or that I should consider it irksome or even miserable. This latter feeling I suppressed more resolutely than any other, the pride and cast of my disposition rendering the idea of being unhappy most repugnant to me. I used to say to myself, happiness and misery depend on ourselves ; if you feel unhappy, raise yourself above your misery, and so act that your happiness may be independent of all accidents.

" To such a disposition I naturally joined great sensibility, and a face, to say the least of it, interesting, one which pleased at first sight without art or effort. My disposition was so conciliating that no one ever passed a quarter of an hour in my company without feeling perfectly at ease, and conversing with me as if we had been old acquaintances. Naturally indulgent I won the confidence of those who had any relations with me, because every one felt that the strictest probity and goodwill were the impulses which I most readily obeyed, and if I may be allowed the expression, I venture to assert in my own behalf that I was a true gentleman, one whose cast of mind was more male than female ; and yet I was anything but masculine, for joined to the mind and character of a man, I possessed the charms of a very agreeable woman. I

trust I shall be pardoned for giving this candid expression of my feelings, instead of seeking to throw around them a veil of false modesty. Besides, this very writing must prove what I have asserted of my mind, disposition, and character."

In continuing this avowal, whose frankness demands that it should be given in no words but her own, she says in extenuation of her actions in the past and in the future, that as she was pleasing, half the road to temptation was traversed, for it was in the very essence of human nature that in such cases the other half should not remain untracked. "For to tempt and to be tempted," she explains, "are things very nearly allied, and in spite of the finest maxims of morality, whenever feeling has anything to do in the matter, no sooner is it excited than we have already gone vastly farther than we are aware of, and I have yet to learn how it is possible to prevent its being excited. Flight alone is perhaps the remedy, but there are cases and circumstances in which flight becomes impossible, for how is it possible to fly, shun, or turn one's back in the midst of a court? The very attempt would give rise to remarks. Now, if you do not fly, there is nothing, it seems to me, so difficult to escape from as that which is essentially agreeable. All that can be said in opposition to it will appear but a prudery quite out of harmony with the natural instincts of the human heart; besides, no one holds his heart

in his hand, tightening or relaxing his grasp of it at pleasure."

Meantime she waited for the interview, the result of which was looked forward to by her friends and enemies with impatience, but of which she, believing in her own abilities and in her fate, had little fear.

CHAPTER VI

The Grand Duchess declares herself tired of suffering—She makes up her mind to alter her conduct—She plays a difficult part—The advice of her confessor—Her interview with the Empress—Reproaches and answers—The Grand Duke's spite—How the scene ended—Awaiting a second audience—Catherine's intrigue with Poniatowski—Peter lays a childish plot which might have had a serious ending—He becomes good friends with his wife's lover—The latter is obliged to leave Russia—Catherine's grief is dissipated by Gregory Orloff—The Empress's health causes alarm—Her terrible fears—Her final hours—Their Majesties are congratulated by their courtiers—The first acts of Peter's reign—His behaviour at the lying in state—His treatment of his wife—His intention to divorce her and disown her son—He visits Prince Ivan—Peter makes himself unpopular—His admiration for Frederick the Great—The latter advises Peter to beware—Conspiracy to overthrow the Emperor—Its principal members—Peter unconsciously aids them—Feeling in the army.

ON the morning succeeding the evening on which she had gone to the play, the Grand Duchess in the hope of winning sympathy and interest, gave out that she was unwell, and remained in her own apartments where she patiently awaited the decision of the Empress. As time passed without bringing any answer to her letter, she thought it prudent to venture out so far as to attend her duty during the first

week in Lent, and publicly exhibit her devotion and attachment to the Orthodox Church. While still in hourly expectation of being summoned to the presence of her Imperial Majesty, news was brought Catherine that the late Commander-in-Chief, General Apraxine, had died suddenly and conveniently of apoplexy on March 17th (1758), before his trial could take place. The shock of his unexpected demise was somewhat softened by the assurance that to the last he had persisted in saying he had acted in accordance with the decisions of the Council of War; and that the only communications sent to him by the Grand Duchess or the Great Chancellor, urged him to obey the instructions he had received from the Government.

While Catherine was yet depressed by the loss of this friend, Alexander Schouvaloff waited on her one morning to say that Madame Vladislava—who under Bestuzhev's instructions had become her sympathetic and confidential friend—had been removed from her service by order of the Czarina. On hearing this the Grand Duchess, overcome with mortification burst into tears and said that while acknowledging her Majesty's right to place with, or remove from her, whomever she pleased, yet she was grieved to find, more and more, that all who came near her were the victims of the Empress's displeasure; and that their numbers might be fewer, she begged that she might be sent home to

her relatives and an end put to a state of things which had made so many people miserable. She also assured Schouvaloff that the removal of Madame Vladislava would not throw light on anything of which she was suspected, as neither she nor any one else possessed her confidence. She was told that the Empress herself would speak to her on the subject. No sooner had Schouvaloff left than her Imperial Highness, boiling with anger, went to her attendants, told them of the dismissal of her lady-in-waiting, and declared that if any duenna whom she happened to dislike took her place, she would receive the worst possible treatment, not even excepting blows; and she asked them to repeat this wherever they pleased, so as to deter all who wished to be placed about her from being in haste to accept the charge; for as she was tired of suffering, and had seen that mildness and patience had no other result than making everything connected with her go from bad to worse, she had made up her mind to change her conduct entirely.

As on the evening of that day she walked restlessly up and down her room agitated in mind and body, one of her maids, who had great sympathy for her, came to the Grand Duchess and said that they were all afraid she would sink under her trials, adding, "Let me go to-day to my uncle—he is your own confessor as well as the Empress's. I will talk to him and tell him everything you wish, and I promise you he will

speak to the Empress in a manner that will give you satisfaction." To this Catherine readily agreed, glad to have any friend who would help her in this hour of her need. The maid therefore went to her uncle, talked the matter over with him, and returned to say that he advised her Imperial Highness to give out during the night that she was ill and wanted to confess, when he would be sent for, and so have an opportunity of hearing of her griefs from her own lips, and so repeating them to her Majesty. Catherine immediately agreed to this, and accordingly between two and three in the morning she rang her bell and declared herself so ill that she must see her confessor. In place of a priest, Alexander Schouvaloff came running to her, and on her asking permission to see her confessor he sent for doctors who were skilful enough to see that her pulse was extremely weak and her condition serious. As for her, she declared that her body had no need of doctors, but that her soul was in danger, when to comfort her the priest was summoned. On his arrival she made him sit by her bedside, and for an hour and a half she talked to him of the Grand Duke's conduct to her, of the hatred of the elder Schouvaloffs for her, of the constant dismissal or banishment of the attendants who had grown attached to her, of the dislike for her with which the Empress had been inspired by her enemies, and finally begged that he would obtain an answer to her letter. She

found him, as she says, anxious to help her and by no means the fool he was reported to be.

He strongly advised her to persist in her demand to be sent home, which would not be complied with because it could not be justified in the eyes of the public who had their attention directed to her ; declared that she had been treated cruelly in being abandoned to her enemies ; that the Empress would have done well to banish the Grand Duke's favourites, especially Elizabeth Woronzoff, and to keep a check upon the Imperial parasites, who by devising new monopolies had become the blood-suckers of the people, who had already complained of their injustice in causing Bestuzhev to be arrested on charges of which he was innocent. He ended by saying he would go at once to her Majesty's apartments and wait there until she woke, that he might speak to her at once on the subject of her Imperial Highness's wrongs; that he would press for the interview the Empress had promised; and that he would state that grief and affliction might cause her death if she were not relieved from her present state of loneliness, abandonment, and suffering.

The result of this interview with the Czarina was that Alexander Schouvaloff was immediately ordered to inquire if the Grand Duchess's condition would permit her to wait on her Majesty that evening ; to which Catherine replied that for such a purpose she would summon all the strength she had left. Schouvaloff

then said he would conduct her to the Empress after midnight. At ten o'clock that night she rose and dressed, and while waiting for this momentous interview, lay down on a couch and fell fast asleep. There she remained until half-past one, when Alexander Schouvaloff roused her to say that the Empress had asked for her. She rose and followed him through empty and silent corridors and antechambers, until arriving at the entrance to her Majesty's apartments, she saw Peter for the first time since the day she had given out that she was ill, for he had never visited her nor sent to make inquiries for her, but had declared that if she died he would marry Elizabeth Woronzoff. He now glided through an opposite door to that by which his wife entered, and gained the Empress's private apartment before her. This was a long and narrow room, having three windows, between which, on two tables, stood a gold toilet service, while at one side was a couch backed by large screens.

Apparently it contained no one but the portly Empress, the Grand Duke with his twisted body, weak legs, and pitted face, and the cringing figure of Alexander Schouvaloff; but Catherine's intuition told her that the young favourite, Ivan Ivanovitch Schouvaloff, was behind the screens, and her sharp eyes at once caught sight of some letters that seemed strangely familiar as they lay in one of the gold basins. The accounts of what followed, as given in Catherine's

Memoirs and in a dispatch of Sir Robert Keith, agree in substance.

Going up to the Empress, who stood severely erect and somewhat disdainful, the Grand Duchess flung herself at her Majesty's feet, and at once begged that her request to be sent home might be granted. "Why do you wish it; do you not remember that you have children?" she was asked; to which she replied, "My children are in your Majesty's hands, and cannot be better placed, and I trust you will not abandon them."

"But what excuse could I give to the public in justification of this step?" the Empress asked; and was told, "Your Imperial Majesty will state, if you think fit, the causes that have brought upon me your Majesty's displeasure and the hatred of the Grand Duke." On being questioned as to how she would manage to exist while with her relatives, she answered boldly that she would live as she had done before she had been summoned to Russia. To this came the statement, "Your mother is a fugitive, she has been compelled to retire, and has gone to Paris," to which Catherine replied, "I am aware of that. She was thought to be too much attached to the interests of Russia, and the King of Prussia has therefore persecuted her." The Empress then bade her rise, and walked away from her musing, but presently turned to say, "God is my witness how I wept when

you were dangerously ill, just after your arrival in Russia. If I had not liked you, I should not have kept you." Catherine answered by thanking her Majesty for all the kindness she had shown her then and since, and declared she should always regard her incurrence of the Imperial displeasure as the greatest misfortune of her life.

Then approaching a step nearer, Elizabeth flashed out, "You are dreadfully haughty. Do you remember that at the Summer Palace I one day approached you, and asked if you had a stiff neck, because I noticed that you hardly bowed to me, and that it was from pride you merely saluted me with a nod?" "Good gracious, madame," said Catherine, "how could your Majesty possibly suppose that I should be haughty to you? I solemnly declare that it never once occurred to me that this question, asked four years ago, could have reference to any such thing." The Empress then said, "You fancy there is no one so clever as yourself"; to which came the answer, "If I ever had any such conceit nothing could be better calculated to undeceive me than my present condition, and this very conversation, since I see that I have been stupid enough not to understand till this moment what you were pleased to say to me four years ago." Her Majesty then turned away once more, and went to where Peter and Alexander Schouvaloff were whispering about her, as she surmised, when she heard the Grand

Duke say, "She is dreadfully spiteful and obstinate." Then the Empress returning to her, said, "You meddle with many things that do not concern you. I should not have dared to do so in the time of the Empress Anna. How, for instance, could you presume to send orders to Marshal Apraxine?" At that Catherine exclaimed in surprise, "I, madame? Never has such an idea entered my head." With eyes lit with anger the Empress said, "What, will you deny having written to him? There are your letters in that basin. You were forbidden to write." Nothing dismayed, the Grand Duchess replied, "True, I have transgressed in this respect, and I beg pardon for it; but since my letters are there those three will prove to your Imperial Majesty that I have never sent him any orders; but that in one of them I informed him what was said of his conduct." Here the Empress interrupted her to ask why she had written to him of that, and was told, "Because I took a great interest in the Marshal, whom I liked very much. I begged him to follow your orders. Of the two other letters, one contains only my congratulations on the birth of his son, and in the other I merely presented to him my compliments of the new year." Upon that her Majesty stated that Bestuzhev, who was then being tried on the charge of high treason, had asserted that the Grand Duchess had written other letters to Apraxine. "If Bestuzhev says so, he lies," Catherine answered. "Very

well then," said her Majesty, "since he has told lies concerning you, I will have him put to the torture." Catherine knew this threat was meant to frighten her, but she replied calmly that her Majesty could act according to her sovereign pleasure, but that she had never written more than these three letters to the Commander-in-Chief.

Elizabeth then turned away and walked up and down the room, her manner showing more anxiety than anger. Occasionally she addressed Alexander Schouvaloff and questioned the Grand Duke, who during the whole of this interview showed great bitterness, animosity, and passion towards his wife, endeavouring as much as he could to excite the displeasure of the Empress against her; but he did it so stupidly and displayed such anger, that he failed in his object, and the penetration and sagacity of the Czarina prompted her to take Catherine's part, and to listen with marked attention and approval to her firm and temperate replies to Peter's outrageous statements; the object of which were, according to his wife, to get rid of her in order that he might establish Elizabeth Woronzoff in her place. Suspecting this, her Majesty approached the Grand Duchess and said in a low voice, "I have many other things to say to you, but I do not wish you to be embroiled more than you are already," and with that she intimated by a look and a gesture that it was on account of

others being present that she did not then speak. Seeing this unexpected sign of sympathy at so critical a moment, Catherine was moved, and in a similar tone responded, "And I also am prevented from speaking, however earnest my desire to open to you my mind and heart." This little speech made a favourable impression on her Majesty, to whose eyes tears rushed, and to conceal her emotion she dismissed their Imperial Highnesses. Peter strode out hurriedly, Catherine followed slowly, each going to their separate apartments.

It was now nearly three o'clock, and on gaining her bedroom the Grand Duchess began to undress, but was soon interrupted by some one knocking at her door. On asking who was there, Alexander Schouvaloff begged to be admitted, and when his wish was granted, he requested that the maids might be dismissed. He then said that the Empress, after talking to him for some time ordered him to tell Catherine not to distress herself, as she would be granted another interview at which they might talk alone. Catherine in turn sent her humble thanks for this kindness which had restored her to life, and said she would look forward to their meeting with the uttermost impatience. After requesting that she would not speak of this promised audience to any one whatsoever, especially the Grand Duke who was greatly irritated against her, Schouvaloff retired.

Days came and went, but the Empress, whose habit it was to postpone all things, made no appointment for their interview, though the Grand Duchess urged Schouvaloff several times to use his influence in hastening it, as she was anxious to have her destiny decided. But while she waited she was visited one morning by Count Michael Woronzoff, who had recently been appointed to Bestuzhev's place as High Chancellor. Though not dressed, she admitted him to her room, when he kissed her hand, pressed it warmly, and then managed to let fall on it a few sympathetic tears. Concealing the fact that she thought this a piece of buffoonery, she asked him to be seated. When he had obeyed, he said he had been charged by the Empress to dissuade her from her desire to leave Russia ; indeed her Majesty had gone so far as to authorise him to beg her in her name to renounce a desire to which she would never give her consent, and that was a source of grief to her. At this Catherine, who was secretly delighted that her supposed wish would not be granted, declared, that although there was nothing she would not do to please her Majesty, yet she believed her life was endangered by the treatment she received, and she once more went over a list of her hardships. He then promised that she should soon have an interview with the Empress, when it was hoped a reconciliation would take place.

For this audience she had yet, however, a long time to wait, and meanwhile, though she knew perfectly well that she would not be sent home she thought it advisable to keep to her own room, as if she did not expect her fate to be finally decided until she had seen the Empress once more. Nor would she quit it to celebrate her birthday. Some sign of Elizabeth's favour was given her, however, on that day, for her Majesty sent word that she had drunk her health at dinner; to which Catherine replied by thanking her for being remembered on a day which she could curse, if it were not also the day of her admittance into the Orthodox Church. But though she would not quit her apartment to celebrate her birthday, she was no sooner told by Poniatowski that one whom she considered her enemy, the French Ambassador, the Marquis de l'Hôpital, had eulogised the firmness of her character in remaining in seclusion, than she at once determined to act in a manner contrary to that which had gained her his praise, and therefore greatly to the surprise of her suite, she one day suddenly appeared amongst them.

At last Alexander Schouvaloff told her one morning that she was to ask through him, and in the presence of others, for permission to see her children that afternoon, and that when she had been permitted to do so, the long-promised interview with her Majesty would take place. She did as directed, and was

allowed to see her second child for the first time since it was born, as well as to take the little Grand Duke Paul in her arms. Later she was conducted to her Majesty, whom she found alone. As Catherine began to express her gratitude for this audience, the Empress said abruptly, "I expect you to reply with sincerity to all questions that I may put to you"; on which the Grand Duchess told her she should hear nothing but the strict truth, and that there was nothing she desired more than to open her heart to her Majesty. She was then asked if she had not really written more than three letters to Apraxine, and solemnly affirmed that she had not. The Empress seemed satisfied that the truth had been spoken to her, and next began to make inquiries regarding Peter's mode of life. The result was that a reconciliation took place between the Czarina and Catherine, to mark which they appeared side by side in a box at the theatre a few evenings later.

According to a dispatch of Sir Robert Keith, this public display of amity took place in May, and a few weeks later their Imperial Highnesses were ordered to their summer residence at Oranienbaum. In going thither they were accompanied by their respective suites, as also, though not publicly, by Poniatowski. The latter had already been recalled to Warsaw, but being as unwilling to leave the Grand Duchess as she was to part with him, he had on the plea of ill health

remained in St. Petersburg. Their frequent meetings there had that air of adventure and romance which lends ardour to love ; for Catherine either left the palace by night, disguised, and accompanied by a trusted member of her husband's troop of comedians, who conducted her to Poniatowski ; or he in cloak and wig was stealthily led to her by the same individual who delighted to enact in real life a part more exciting than any he played upon the stage.

In this way, while the Court remained at St. Petersburg, their liaison escaped observation, which it would be more difficult to avoid in the country, where Poniatowski's presence could only be explained on the ground that he had followed his mistress. But though he made no appearance at the Court at Oranienbaum, it was known to several interested in the Grand Duchess, her husband among the rest, that the Pole was in the neighbourhood, and paid surreptitious visits to Catherine. His Imperial Highness saw nothing in this to excite his wrath, but much that might afford him amusement if skilfully managed. Orders were therefore secretly given by him to his Holstein Guards to keep a sharp look-out for a stranger who had been seen prowling about the grounds after nightfall, and to bring him word at once if such a suspicious figure were seen. A few evenings later a breathless messenger announced to Peter that a man dressed as a mechanic was seen

loitering near the house. At that his Imperial Highness instantly dispatched an officer who was in the secret, to bring the stranger to him by force if necessary. Poniatowski, awaiting a summons from Catherine, was still walking up and down a shaded path, when he felt a rough hand on his shoulder, and heard a gruff voice ask who he was and what he wanted. Though startled, he answered readily that he was a German tailor who had come to take orders for a suit of clothes from one of the household. In reply he was told that he must present himself before the Grand Duke, to which he answered that though his fortune might depend upon it, he must decline the honour, as he had not a moment to spare. As he said this, he darted hastily forward, but was instantly brought to a halt by having a handkerchief with a slip-knot flung over his head, which gripped him by the throat, while the gruff voice said to him jeeringly, "Whether you have time or not, you must follow me."

Delighted at the idea of being able to mortify and frighten his wife, and still more to be able to play at holding a court-martial, Peter dressed himself in the full uniform of a Holstein officer, and by beat of drum and sound of bugle summoned his officers. When they were seated, he at their head, in the great hall whose walls were covered with sabres, flags, and muskets, Poniatowski was led before them. Neither Peter nor

any of those around him pretended to recognise the prisoner, nor would he give his name or explain why he had come to Oranienbaum. The result was that after a brief trial he was condemned to be shot for having entered by stealth the lines of the Grand Duke's fortifications. He was then taken to the guard-house to await his execution. It is possible that Peter would have carried out a sentence which would have had the double advantage of striking a blow at his wife and affording himself a pretext for a military display, had not one of his officers insisted that Poniatowski being still a foreign minister, he could not be put to death without the express permission of the Empress. While the Grand Duke hesitated to ask for what he knew would be refused, Catherine was in a state of indignation and terror; but knowing by this time the means by which all things were gained in Russia, she collected all the money she could lay hands on, and offered it to Elizabeth Woronzoff on the condition that she induced the Grand Duke to set Poniatowski free. This was readily done. Poniatowski was once more brought before Peter, who declared he had just learned who his prisoner really was, that the disguise he wore prevented all recognition, and that the precautions taken to guard Oranienbaum were necessary for his, the speaker's, safety. This gave to Poniatowski an opportunity to congratulate him on the military arrangements, the excellency of

which he had discovered to his cost ; at which Peter, delighted with so sympathetic and appreciative a man said, "What a fool you have been not to have taken me into your confidence before." Henceforth they were good friends, as the Grand Duke was anxious to show ; for according to a statement taken from an autobiographical fragment of Poniatowski, which was found by the Russian author, Waliszewski, that very evening while the Pole, Elizabeth Woronzoff, and Peter were having a confidential chat in the apartment of the latter, he suddenly called out, "Since we are all good friends, there is one wanting," and with that "he goes into his wife's room, pulls her out of bed without leaving her time to put on her stockings or shoes, and without so much as a petticoat, brings her in to us, and says, pointing to me, 'Well, here he is, and I hope you will be satisfied.'" Supper to which the four sat down followed, and lasted until past three in the morning.

After that Poniatowski, according to the same autobiography, often went to Oranienbaum, which he reached in the evening, and supped with their Imperial Highnesses and Elizabeth Woronzoff; but this could not have been for very long, for the news of Poniatowski's arrest and trial having spread abroad, the scandal was seized upon by the Marquis de l'Hôpital, who thought him opposed to the interests of France, to induce the tolerant Empress to insist on having the Pole recalled.

Poniatowski was therefore obliged to leave Russia, though both he and Catherine believed he would soon return. Shortly after his departure, the man who was the chief cause of it, the Marquis de l'Hôpital, was replaced in February 1760 by the young and handsome Baron de Breteuil, who among other instructions had been told to make love to Catherine and to supply Poniatowski's place. This he failed to do for two reasons; because he was in love with his own wife, and because the Grand Duchess was still heart-sore for her beloved Pole. Still craving for his return, and anxious that the French monarch should use his influence with the King of Poland to send Poniatowski back to St. Petersburg as his representative, she received the new French Minister with gracious friendliness, and unblushingly assured him, as he writes in one of his dispatches, that she had been brought up to love the French people, that she had long had a preference for them, and that this sentiment was recalled to her by his services. These were his promised pleadings on her behalf, which after all met with a refusal; for without wishing to offend the Grand Duchess, his most Christian Majesty declared himself obliged "to avoid granting her wishes."

Before this time Bestuzhev's trial, which had been going on for six months, and at which nothing incriminating could be proved against him, ended in his being sentenced to death; though this punishment

was as usual with the clement Elizabeth, mitigated to banishment, not to Siberia, but to an estate he owned at Goretovo, a hundred and twenty versts beyond Moscow.

Meantime, while the Grand Duchess was corresponding with Poniatowski and planning for his return, her attention was attracted to a man of superb physique who, as aide-de-camp to Count Peter Schouvaloff, Grand Master of Artillery, lived in the barrack almost opposite the Winter Palace. This was Gregory Orlof, who over six feet high, had the strength of a giant and the carriage of an athlete, while his face with its honey-coloured complexion, golden hair, deep blue eyes, and beautifully moulded features, gave him an undisputed right to be considered the handsomest man in Russia. Though his appearance was sufficient to attract the ardent admiration of Catherine, he possessed another quality which still more appealed to her, that of daring courage, not only in warfare as he had signally proved at the Battle of Zorndorf, but in the cause of love, as he at this time showed, and in this way. Count Peter Schouvaloff, who as uncle of the younger favourite was all powerful, and on whose favour Gregory Orlof's fortunes greatly depended, had for his mistress an exceedingly lovely woman, the Princess Helen Kourakin, whom he worshipped. As his aide-de-camp also fell in love with her, he besieged and won her affections, on discovering which

Schouvaloff's anger was unbounded, and dismissing Gregory Orlof, he swore that he would use all his influence with the Empress to have him exiled to Siberia. Gregory was, however, a favourite of fortune, for before Count Peter had time to take his revenge, death removed him hurriedly from the scene, leaving his successful rival with a reputation that made him irresistible to innumerable women.

Among all these none pleased him so much as the Grand Duchess, who found in this man of little education and no culture, a temperament entirely different from that of her late lover, who had read, travelled, and had enjoyed the society of distinguished men; while Gregory's brusque manner, stormy temper, and invigorating presence presented a still greater contrast to the gracious air, delicate consideration, and appealing melancholy of the absent Poniatowski. On Gregory's part his passion for Catherine became so absorbing as not only to make him neglect the Princess for whom he had risked much, but to become reckless in his devotion to her Imperial Highness, so that as she wrote to Poniatowski, this new lover followed her everywhere, and perpetrated a thousand follies for her sake. Gregory Orlof, who was destined to become associated with the most important step in her life, was one of four brothers, all of whom were equally tall and vigorous, and were devoted to each other. Besides Gregory, two of them, Alexis and Ivan, were

COUNT GREGORY ORLOFF.

in the army, where the reputation for strength enjoyed by all three, their boisterous delight in life, their free and friendly manners, and withal their power to command obedience and enforce authority, made them worshipped by their men. To gain the influence of Gregory, and through him that of his attached brothers, was an advantage to which Catherine was far from being indifferent ; for already she saw that a time of change and struggle was at hand, the outcome of which would mean to her supreme power or banishment, if not death.

With a view to coming events, those who were friendly to the Grand Duchess and who saw in her the saviour of Russia, as well as those who without feeling any predilection in her favour, believed that Peter—weak and wilful, with the intellect of a child, and the vices of a drunkard—would assuredly ruin the country if permitted to reign over it, were now entering into various intrigues which had the common purpose of depriving him of the throne. Detesting him as she did, and knowing that "that devil of a nephew" of hers was wholly incapable of ruling the empire which was dear to her, many thought that the Empress would disinherit him in favour of the little Grand Duke Paul ; but if she contemplated this action, she postponed it, as she did so many others. All through the year 1761 her health gave more and more cause for alarm. But as she drew near to death her love

of life grew stronger, and seeking to rouse herself and hold her grasp on the world, she attended masquerades, balls, and Court ceremonies, from which she was carried back exhausted to her room, where she knelt and wept before a favourite ikon, begging that her days might be prolonged.

As it was, they were far from happy. Her dread of death was so great that news of the demise of any one she had known, was by her orders withheld from her, and no one was admitted to her presence who was dressed in mourning. Added to this she became haunted by fears lest her weakness might be taken advantage of to fling her from the throne; and that she might not be taken by surprise and suddenly open her eyes on the guards who came to seize her, a trusted male attendant armed from head to foot was appointed to watch over her while she slept. The hours spent in this way were few, for she dreaded to lie down, and hated the night; and in order to while it away she went, as long as she was able, to the opera or to a play at eleven o'clock, and returned to a supper which seldom ended before five in the morning.

But at last the inevitable day came. In December of this year (1761) her strength had become depleted, her legs so swollen that she could no longer walk, and when on the 23rd a violent fit of coughing was followed by hæmorrhage, it was seen that the end was near. Her confessor broke this fact to her, which

she received with unexpected calmness. Preparations for the great event were made when, stripped of all her power and heavily laden with memories of many cruelties done to the weak and helpless, she would enter another sphere. While she whispered repentant sentences that had no power to repair the wrongs she had inflicted, and listened to words that were meant to convey consolation, her anterooms were filled by statesmen and courtiers who deeply regretted the passing of one who would make room for such a successor as Peter ; and who with heads together, with eyes full of speculation, with ears alert, were even then conspiring against him.

For days past crowds of men and women protected against the bitter cold by sables or by sheep-skins, their faces melancholy and fearful, had crowded the churches to pray for her recovery, conspicuous among them, most stricken and devout, being the Grand Duchess, whose brain as she bent her head was seething with plots, whose heart was beating between hope and fear. For even now, nay even with her last breath, the Empress might name the little Grand Duke as her successor with Alexander Schouvaloff as his Regent. Her uncertainty on this point did not last long. On Christmas Eve (Old Style) she and the Grand Duke were summoned to the chamber of the dying woman. There they arrived with a demure air, and going down on their knees by the bedside listened to slow gasping words

which were construed into a blessing and a farewell ; after which they were dismissed and went back to their apartments to await the moment when they should no longer be state prisoners, watched, reported on, interfered with, but be sovereigns on whose will millions of abject subjects humbly waited. On the afternoon of the following day, the Grand Chamberlain of the Empress went in state to the apartments of the Grand Duke, and in a solemn voice told him that her Majesty commanded him to live long ; a form of announcing her death.

A vivid picture of the events which followed Elizabeth's demise is given in the dispatches of the foreign ministers and in the Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw, a sister of Peter's favourite Elizabeth Woronzoff, and niece of the Great Chancellor. The Princess, who at this time was in her eighteenth year, had originally been drawn to the Grand Duchess by their common love of literature and philosophy, subjects of which those around them were in general ignorant, but of which they talked for hours. Ardent, high-spirited, ambitious, and active, the Princess shared many of the characteristics of Catherine, with whose troubles she sympathised, whose danger she foresaw, and whose cause she warmly espoused. Scarcely had the Empress Elizabeth breathed her last, when the Senate and the Chiefs of the Supreme Colleges of the Empire arrived at the Winter Palace to take the oaths

of loyalty to the new Emperor, after which the regiments of the guards, who were drawn up before the windows, did the same. Later the Master of Ceremonies, Baron Lefort, was sent to the houses of the foreign ministers to announce that the Emperor and Empress would receive them in the great gallery of the palace on the following morning.

When they had kissed their Majesties hands and offered their congratulations, they were bidden to stay to dinner, and to draw for their places, an example set them by their Imperial host and hostess. Before they sat down, Peter triumphantly announced the first act of his reign to the English Ambassador, to whom he said that on the previous evening he had dispatched courtiers to the several bodies of his army with orders not to advance farther into Prussian territory, and to abstain from all hostilities. Frederick II. was at this time so overwhelmed by the disastrous results of his prolonged war with Austria and France, assisted by their ally Russia, and so desperate as to lead his partisan Raumer to believe "that if he had not met with death on the field of battle, he was resolved in case of extremity to die by his own hand"; taking advantage of which desperate condition, Russia had seriously contemplated annexing Prussia. It may, therefore, be imagined that Peter's action in recalling his troops and stopping the war, was regarded with dismay by his subjects.

A more popular act of his was the release from Siberia of some seventeen thousand state prisoners, out of the twenty thousand that had been sent there during the previous reign. Among these was Marshal Münnich, who for twenty years had not been allowed to speak to mortal save his wife, his servants, and occasionally to his guards. He arrived at the court and presented himself to the Emperor dressed in the sheepskins he had worn in his long exile, when Peter warmly welcomed him, restored to him the badges of the Order of St. Andrew, and though he was then in his seventy-ninth year, made him his first Field-Marshal. Another figure once familiar at the Court of St. Petersburg, Count Lestock, was summoned from Siberia to receive many favours from the new sovereign, among them that which Peter considered the greatest, a sword which he said was Prussian, and that he himself had worn several times. But though his Majesty behaved with graciousness to those whom Elizabeth had considered her enemies, he also showed kindness to her favourites, for Ivan Ivanovitch Schouvaloff was allowed to keep the estates and wealth given him by his Imperial mistress; Count Alexis Razumovsky was permitted to retain his post as Grand Veneur, and later to retire to his magnificent country seat about forty miles from the capital; and Count Cyril Razumovsky became a trusted favourite, who was continued in his military appointments.

Within a few weeks the new Emperor's popularity grew apace, especially when at the instigation of the Great Chancellor, he went in state to the Senate and there read a paper at which he had scarcely looked previously, declaring that in future the nobility might enter the army or not, or take service in the armies of European powers in alliance with Russia, according to their inclinations, and that they might travel abroad if they so wished—a liberty never before allowed them. His reduction of the salt tax was received by the poor with gratitude; but all classes hailed with delight his abolishment of the cruel and dreaded Secret Chancery or State Inquisition, where those suspected of plotting against the State were subjected to hideous torture, to induce confessions of their own guilt or that of others. Every day he who had been so unaccustomed to liberty, rode abroad and received the salutes of the public with unfeigned joy; he harassed his troops with incessant reviews, which gave him the greatest pleasure; he invited himself to dinner at Sir Robert Keith's, because his uncle the Prince of Holstein, "and some other of the great people had made a party to eat soup with him"; he ordered that the French courtesy should be substituted for the Russian mode of salutation, principally it would seem, that he might laugh loudly and long at the elderly ladies whose attempts at obeying his wishes made them ridiculous; he went down to the Senate when unexpected and

finding it almost deserted, sent for its absent members, each of whom as he entered was received by a shower of blows from the staff his Majesty always carried with him. There were other changes made, which will be mentioned later.

While the Winter Palace was thronged with courtiers who upheld or plotted against the Emperor, while the streets rang with the sound of bugles and the tramp of soldiers going to or coming from reviews, while the air was full of rumours of strange innovations to be made, while the Foreign Ministers were exasperated or delighted by the new policy which had stopped the war and would make itself felt all over Europe, the late sovereign lay in state for six weeks in the Court chapel, which was hung with black velvet, and lit by tall candles, whose steady flames seemed lurid in the gloom. Here bearded priests in sombre vestments celebrated mass and sung requiems for the departed spirit of the Empress, whose remains lay beneath a pall of Imperial purple, guarded by mute and motionless sentinels, and attended by relays of ladies of the highest rank who knelt in prayer. None among them showed such touching grief, such profound piety, as her Imperial Majesty, who came daily to pay her tributes of respect to the departed sovereign. Her conduct, according to the Princess Daschkaw, won the heart of every beholder; while Baron de Breteuil, though doubting her sincerity, says that the clergy

and the people believed her to be deeply affected, and were delighted. In this way Catherine pointed as usual to the marked difference between her actions and those of her husband, who if it were not for her protests, would have stripped the funeral rites of half their ceremonies, and who on the rare occasions when he visited the remains of his benefactress, was to be seen, according to the Princess Daschkaw, "whispering and laughing with the ladies in attendance, ridiculing the priests, and finding fault with the officers and even sentinels on duty, on some unimportant article of dress, the tie of their cravats, the size of their buckles, and the cut of their uniforms." This description of his behaviour might seem as exaggeration unworthy of belief, if the Austrian Ambassador in writing some weeks later, did not mention his surprise at seeing him during the celebration of mass walking about the Court chapel talking and laughing aloud to the ladies and gentlemen of the Imperial suite, while Catherine, with bowed head was absorbed in silent prayer.

Always jealous of, though frequently acknowledging, her superior mind, he now took the revenge which weak natures seize when opportunity is given them, of resenting and hating the power that had guided and helped them, and from the first day of his reign treated her with an indifference that soon swelled to insult. As early as January 15th, the French Ambas-

sador reports that she was "in the cruellest state and treated with the most marked contempt." In continuing he says, to the Duke de Choiseul, "I have told you how she endeavoured to fortify herself with philosophy, and how little this food consorts with her disposition. I now know for certain that she is already much put out by the way in which the Emperor treats her, and by the airs of Elizabeth Woronzoff. I should not be surprised, knowing her courage and violence, if this were to drive her to some extremity. I know that some of her friends are doing their best to pacify her, but they would risk everything for her if she required it." The English Ambassador in commenting a few weeks later on her absence from a splendid banquet which Peter gave to celebrate his birthday, states that she had lost her influence over the Emperor, and that it was generally known that she was not to be consulted on matters of business.

The fact was that it now seemed possible to his Majesty to put into practice the idea with which he had for some time been inspired, of getting rid of his wife that he might make Elizabeth Woronzoff his Empress. This intention of his was mentioned by him to her sister within three days of his succession. "If, my little friend," he added to the Princess Daschkaw, who disliked the spitting, squinting, boisterous Elizabeth as much as she did his Majesty, whom the same evening she accused of cheating at

cards, "you will take my advice, pay a little attention to us; the time may come when you will have good reason to repent of any negligence shown to your sister; believe me it is for your interest alone I speak; you have no other way of making yourself of any consequence in the world than by studying her disposition, and striving to gain her countenance and protection." Though he would have disowned Catherine without ceremony, it seemed to his ambitious mistress that some reason should be shown for it to the public, with whom Catherine was popular. Remembering old scandals, she therefore suggested that Sergius Soltikoff should be recalled from his post as Minister at Homburg, questioned as to his intrigue with Catherine, and induced to confess that the little Grand Duke was his son. This was immediately acted on, when the sprightly and faithless Sergius at once returned to St. Petersburg where he was welcomed by Peter who showered favours on him. Desiring a continuance of these, and dreading disgrace and banishment, Sergius was ready and willing to make any assertions required of him. Matters then seemed so smooth that it only remained to Peter to repudiate his wife on the grounds of her unfaithfulness, to disown as illegitimate her son, whom he had hitherto refused to nominate as his successor, and to find one on whom he would confer that honour.

The person who had most right to this was the

unhappy Ivan, of whose insanity his Majesty either had not heard or did not believe in. At all events, as is mentioned by Sir Robert Keith among other authorities, Peter went to the fortress of Schlusselburg, where this unfortunate victim of fate, now grown to manhood, was confined. Thoroughly imbecile, his statements were wild and disconnected. Among other things he wished it to be understood that he was not the person he represented, as Ivan had long since been taken up to heaven ; however as he bore his name he was determined to support all his claims. Seeing that he was lodged in one small cell, the Emperor gave orders that Ivan should be allowed to walk about the fortress wherever he pleased, until such time as a suite of rooms could be built for him. And as this poor imbecile could not be nominated as heir to the throne, Peter resolved that he would name one of his Holstein kindred as such.

Meantime the Czar, wantonly and with amazing foolishness, did all in his power to make himself hated by his subjects. Beginning with the clergy, the most conservative, the most influential section in the empire, he openly showed ridicule and contempt for the rites and ceremonies of the Orthodox Church, which in the late reign he had barely concealed. He also constructed a Lutheran chapel at Oranienbaum, where he attended the services and distributed hymn-books among his Holstein soldiers. He next issued an

order, which even Peter the Great in his time had been unable to enforce, that the priests should shave their beards. Worse still, he annexed to the Crown the monastery lands throughout the whole empire, in return for which he assigned to the archbishops and abbots certain fixed pensions, with sums for the maintenance of the monks. On protesting against this outrageous act, the venerable Archbishop of Novgorod was banished ; but so great was the fury that this caused among all classes, that Peter was obliged to send for the Archbishop who returned in triumph to St. Petersburg. Another blow was aimed at the clergy when it was ordered that their sons should enlist as soldiers.

He next attacked the army, in whose power it lay to make or unmake the sovereigns of Russia. His first offence in this direction was the appointment of his uncle Prince George of Holstein, who was universally disliked, and who had no qualifications for the post, as Commander-in-Chief of the army, and head of the Horse Guards, a position which had previously always been held by the sovereign. He then disbanded the famous Life Company of the Guards, whose officers had been largely instrumental in placing the late Empress on the throne, and who had since that time claimed and received special honours and recognition. The members of this corps, who were principally men of rank, were given the choice of

joining other regiments or of retiring on half-pay; but, says Sir Robert Keith, "there are not half a dozen of them who have chosen the former." It next pleased his Majesty to displace the regiment whose duty it was to guard the Imperial palace and to substitute his own beloved Holstein soldiers. Subsequently he altered the collars and facings of the Russian uniform in imitation of the Prussian soldiery: but most abhorrent of all to his troops was his introduction of the severe Prussian drill and discipline, which though murmuring against they were obliged to adopt.

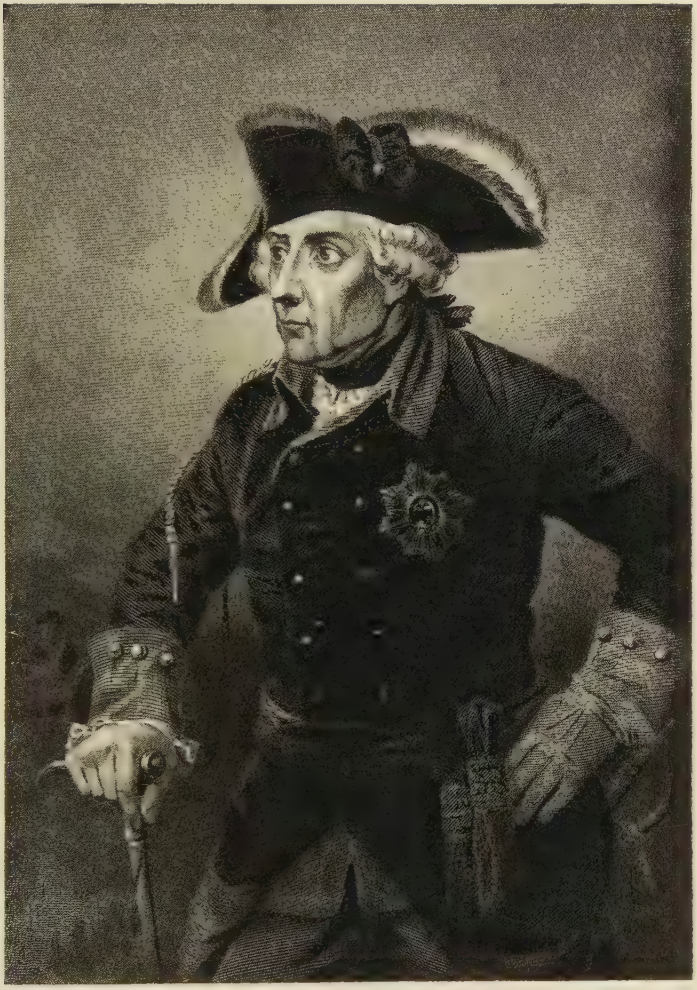
Then came perpetual parades, marches, reviews, which were utterly distasteful to regiments long accustomed to leisure and idleness. It was at the close of one of these reviews, and before the whole regiment of the Ismaeloffsky Guards, that the Czar gave a proof of that childishness which brought him the ridicule and scorn of his subjects. As he was about to quit the field where the manœuvres had taken place, he happened to see at some distance his favourite, the negro Narcissus, fighting furiously with the scavenger of the regiment. In a second he drew up his horse, and with an expression of consternation and sorrow said to Count Cyril Razumovsky who was beside him, "Narcissus is lost to us for ever." As the Marshal was unable to see any cause for such distress, he inquired what his Majesty meant. "What," said the Czar, "don't you, as a military man, see how

impossible it is that I should ever again allow Narcissus into my company once he has disgraced himself by touching the scavenger?" Controlling his countenance Razumovsky suggested that Narcissus might have his honour retrieved, if he were covered by the banners of the regiment. His Majesty grasped at the idea with delight and summoning the negro, told him he was about to rescue him from the infamy he had incurred by coming in contact with the scavenger. Narcissus who did not understand what was said, began to defend his conduct in having punished a rascal who had attacked him, and when by his Imperial Majesty's order, the guards attempted to pass him three times under the banners of their regiment, he resisted so stoutly that four men were obliged to hold him while the work of purification was gravely carried out. The Emperor then considered that blood must give a final seal to the negro's cleansing, for which purpose the spiked end of a banner was brought sharply in contact with his skull until the poor wretch roared with pain and protested against the cruelty of his master, who looked on with the gravest solemnity, while his officers were scarcely able to conceal their laughter.

Peter's devotion to military affairs was the highest form of flattery he could pay to Frederick II., whom he was proud to call "my master." In speaking of the Czar's infatuation, Keith says in one of his

dispatches, "The Emperor's friendship, I might call it passion, for the King of Prussia is above all expression; and nothing would be so likely to make the Emperor fly off, as the smallest appearance of indifference towards that monarch or his interests." A portrait of Frederick, rescued from the dust of a lumber-loft where it had lain during the late reign, was placed by the Emperor in his bedroom; while in writing to his "worthy master," he desired that the Order of the Black Eagle might be conferred on him. The name of Frederick was for ever on his lips. "Do you know that before I was Grand Duke, I was a lieutenant in the service of the King of Prussia?" he said one day to Cyril Razumovsky, who replied, "Well, your Majesty may now make the King of Prussia a Field-Marshal."

As already stated, he had on the evening of his succession ordered his troops to cease all hostilities against Prussia; an act which was followed a few days later by a letter written to Frederick, expressing his friendship for him and his determination to end the war. Sir Andrew Mitchell, the English Envoy at the Court of Berlin, in writing on January 30th, 1762, regrets that he had not been present when it was received by the King. "I really believe," he continues, "it is the only letter he perhaps ever received that exceeded his expectations, and surpassed even his powers of imagination. For my part I cannot help



After a picture by H. Ramberg.

FREDERICK THE GREAT.

considering this great and unexpected event as an indication that Providence is resolved in the last hour to save the King." Frederick, however, cannot have been surprised at Peter's resolution, as throughout the war the latter had betrayed Russia to her enemy. The Emperor himself gloried in letting it be known that he had played the part of a traitor; for it is mentioned on more than one authority, that when at table before a large company among whom were Wolkoff, principal secretary of the Conference of Ministers, his Majesty said one evening, "Ah, the King of Prussia, he is a magician, a sorcerer, for he knew all our plans of campaign as soon as they were settled on. Isn't that so, Wolkoff?" he asked of the wretch who was ready to sink with shame, a feeling Peter could not understand. "Why are you embarrassed? You needn't have any fear of Siberia now. Isn't it true that you told me all the plans the Ministers had settled on, and that I sent them off to his Majesty?" A suspension of hostilities between Russia and Prussia was formally agreed to on March 16th, after which a treaty of peace, in which Peter insisted on giving back every inch of territory captured from Prussia by Russia, was prepared.

In the meantime Frederick, who was kept well informed of all that passed in the Court of St. Petersburg, and who probably foresaw the inevitable result of the Czar's conduct, ordered the Prussian Minister

to keep on good terms with and to pay all deference to Catherine. He also wrote to Peter advising him not to meddle with the Orthodox Church; to effect his changes in the army gradually; to show respect to his Consort; to have himself crowned without delay and with all the pomp and ceremony dear to his people; and to use all possible care to guard his possession of the throne. To this Peter, who blindly believed himself beloved by the people he had betrayed, insulted, and humiliated, answered, "In regard to the concern you take in my safety, I beseech you to give yourself no uneasiness. The soldiers call me their father; they say they had rather be governed by a man than a woman. I take my walks alone about the streets of St. Petersburg; if any one designed to do me a harm, he would have executed his purpose long ago; but I am continually doing good on all occasions that offer, and I trust in the protection of God alone. With that I have nothing to fear."

But while Peter passed his time in drinking German beer and smoking clay pipes with his Holstein soldiers; while in a state of semi-intoxication he cheated at cards; while he devoted himself to Elizabeth Woronzoff and uncomplainingly received the blows she gave him; while, as Castera states, he lived familiarly with buffoons and invited players to sit down to table with himself and the ladies and gentlemen of his Court, a conspiracy of which he had no suspicion was being brewed whose

effects he was soon to feel. Those chiefly concerned in it were the young Princess Daschkaw, arrogant, impetuous, undisciplined, and desirous of playing a flamboyant part in the drama of an insurrection; Nikita Ivanovitch Panin, her husband's uncle, a pale valetudinarian, studious, precise, cautious, a pasteboard courtier, who had been a gentleman of the bedchamber to Elizabeth, subsequently a minister plenipotentiary to the Courts of Denmark and Stockholm, and at the present time was Governor to the Grand Duke Paul; the three Orloffs, daring, bold, and boisterous men, who were attached to Catherine's cause; Count Villebois, the Master of Artillery; and Count Cyril Razumovsky, whose position as Marshal, and whose popularity with his men, gave him great influence. Though all were agreed that for the good of the country Peter must be deposed, yet they were divided as to whether the Grand Duke Paul should be proclaimed Emperor, with his mother as Regent during his minority, or whether she should be declared supreme Sovereign.

The most active and determined of these conspirators was the Princess Daschkaw, who while seemingly visiting her friends or receiving them in her own house, was in reality striving to enlist officers in the ranks of her party. The first whom she won to her cause were two brother officers of her husband, Passik and Bredichin, both captains in the Preobraginsky Guards, and Major Rasloffeff of the Ismaeloffsky

Guards. These undertook in turn to sound the feelings of their men and foster a spirit of rebellion in them. In this there was no difficulty; for not only were they in revolt against the constant exercises required of them, against the innovations in dress and drill to which they had to submit, against the number of German officers placed over them, but their indignation was now aroused by Peter's preparations to make war upon Denmark, whose king some forty years previously had taken the little duchy of Schleswig from Holstein. Its contemplated recovery by the Czar, gave no satisfaction to his subjects, who could gain nothing by it, though it caused them to murmur at the expense such an undertaking would involve; while not only the army but the people at large were aggrieved by the fact that he had just sacrificed conquests which might have been of great importance to the empire, on the plea of securing a peace which he hurried to break from motives of personal prejudice and revenge.

More than half of Peter's anticipated joy in the war in which he was to take part arose from the thought that his journey into Prussia would enable him to embrace his worthy master; an honour for which as Frederick was in no way anxious, he strongly advised the Emperor to forego his hostilities against Denmark and take care of his empire. But even to his voice Peter was deaf for once. The indignation

of the army rose to its height when it became known that his Majesty intended to send the famous and pampered Ismaeloffsky and Preobraginsky Guards into Pomerania, there to join other regiments that were ready to attack Denmark. Of this feeling a hint was thrown out to him by Count Cyril Razumovsky, who on Peter saying that he would give him the command of the army, replied, "Then your Majesty must give me a second army to drive forward that which I am to command." Though the spirit of revolt was strong and universal in the lower ranks of the army, it had not yet reached their officers, with a few exceptions. Aware of this Count Cyril Razumovsky called together a number of those on whose friendship he could depend, and without making any statement regarding the plot already in existence, assured them that the bulk of the army was in revolt against the Czar and had determined to dethrone him, and that if they did not declare themselves the leaders of their men, they would have to become either their followers or their victims. When they asked what they were to do, they were told that they were to join him the instant the insurrection broke out, when he would assign to each the post to which his rank entitled him.

On their part the Orloff brothers were not backward in inducing their friends to join the plot; and the influence of the conspirators was strengthened by the addition of the Archbishop of Novgorod, fresh from

the exile Peter had been obliged to end, a man who was worshipped by the people and all-powerful with the clergy. While the conspirators worked in various directions, Catherine, without mixing among them, eagerly listened to the reports secretly brought her, and skilfully directed their actions. She was also clever enough to reconcile the opposing parties among them, by promising Count Panin that under her reign he should be appointed Great Chancellor, though this promise was not made in the presence of those whose jealousy it might excite.

There were now, in June 1762, six months after Peter's ascending the throne, some thirty or forty officers and about ten thousand men ready to take part in an insurrection. The great difficulty was to restrain the impatient soldiers from breaking into open rebellion before a favourable opportunity offered itself. Some of the leaders strongly urged that the Czar should be seized at the close of one of his nightly orgies when he and his companions were drunk. Passik, a brutal and stubborn man, was eager to stab him before the whole Court, but this was not listened to by the others, who decided that it would be best to wait until July, when his Majesty embarked for Denmark. However, the desired event was brought about by an incident which none had foreseen.

CHAPTER VII

Peter celebrates the Signing of Peace with Prussia—He openly insults his wife—He orders her arrest—He refuses to believe in a plot to dethrone him—He leaves the Capital—The sudden arrest of a conspirator—The Princess Daschkaw hears the news—Alexis Orloff rides to Peterhoff and brings Catherine to St. Petersburg—Perils on the way—Her reception by the Guards—Goes to the Church of Our Lady of Kasan, where a Te Deum is sung—Scene at the Winter Palace—His Majesty hears of the insurrection—The remark of his mistress—The Great Chancellor makes a suggestion—Marshal Münnich advises resistance—Peter hesitates and is lost—He sets out for Cronstadt and is not permitted to land there—He accepts the council of his frightened women—Catherine reviews the troops and sets out for Peterhoff—She receives a humble letter from Peter—He offers to abdicate—He is made prisoner—The Princess Daschkaw and Gregory Orloff—Marshal Münnich's reply to the Empress—Her triumphal entrance into St. Petersburg—A night alarm—She treats her soldiers like troublesome children.

A TREATY of peace having been signed by the Czar with the King of Prussia, the former resolved to celebrate the event with all possible display and splendour, on June 21st, 1762. At noon on that date he held a grand review, when seated on a grey charger, spontoon in hand, he commanded to his glory and satisfaction all the troops available.

The Empress was not in the field where this display took place, but witnessed it from a window of the Winter Palace; her thoughts no doubt busy in speculating as to the number of those marching and manœuvring obediently before Peter, who were ready at a sign to rise in revolt against him. On the same evening there was a brilliant exhibition of fireworks in the palace grounds, when Catherine was permitted to sit beside her husband and see them. Before this entertainment ended, his Imperial Majesty noticed Elizabeth Woronzoff among the courtiers, when calling aloud he bade her sit at his left. As she obeyed the Empress rose and in silent indignation quitted the scene.

The evening ended with a magnificent banquet, to which all the nobility of the first three classes and the foreign Ministers were invited. The Empress was present at this and sat in the centre of the table. In due course Peter, who was rather uncertain on his legs, proposed three toasts which, as arranged, were drunk in goblets to the discharge of cannon from the fortress. These were to the health of the King of Prussia; to the continuance of the happy peace which had been concluded; and to the health of the Imperial family. Catherine drank the last of these seated, which put her consort in a passion, and caused him to send Adjutant General Goudovitch, who was standing in attendance behind his chair, to inquire why she

had not risen to drink the toast. Her answer was that, as the Imperial family consisted of her husband, her son, and herself, she did not think his Majesty would have thought it necessary for her to rise. This reply having been delivered Goudovitch was ordered to return and tell her she was a fool, and that she ought to have known that his uncle, Prince George of Holstein, was also a member of the Imperial family. But lest his message might not be correctly repeated, Peter leant forward, and addressing his wife, shouted out, "You are a fool." However indignant Catherine must have felt at receiving such a public insult, she thought it wisest to exhibit meekness and patience; so she merely allowed some tears to trickle down her cheeks, and then with an effort asked her chamberlain, who stood behind her chair, Count Strogonoff, to say something which would cheer and help her to forget her mortification. This he willingly did, and was rewarded that night by a command to quit the Court and betake himself to his estate at Kamennoi Ostroff, and not to leave it without special permission. At the same time Peter ordered the Empress to be arrested, but this was retracted at the special request of Prince George of Holstein.

A couple of days later he set out for Oranienbaum, leaving the capital free to the conspirators, in whose existence he refused to believe; for when in the eleventh hour, Baron Goltz, whom the King of Prussia

had sent to St. Petersburg, told him of his suspicions that a plot was being hatched against him, the Czar angrily said, "If you are my friend, never speak to me again on that odious subject." At Oranienbaum, surrounded by his Holstein soldiers, he again celebrated the peace with Prussia, his rejoicings being so great on this occasion as to deprive him of his senses and the use of his limbs. But while yet able to speak on this evening, he had invested Elizabeth Woronzoff with the Order of St. Catherine, which had heretofore been conferred on princesses of the blood only. This, which was generally regarded as the first step towards placing her on the throne, caused grave anxiety to the friends of the Empress, and made them yet more impatient to strike the blow which would deprive Peter of his crown.

Two days after the Emperor's departure from St. Petersburg, Catherine was ordered to the summer palace of Peterhoff, where it was his Majesty's intention to celebrate his name feast on the 29th of the month. As the Empress was unaccompanied by the Court, and as the members of her suite were restricted in numbers, she took up her residence in a house in the grounds of the palace which had been built by Peter the Great, and was situated on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. This was selected, nominally for the purpose of allowing arrangements for the coming celebration to be carried on without

interruption at the palace, but really because it afforded her an opportunity of seeing her friends unobserved when they came to tell her of the developments of the conspiracy; and because it would permit her in case of necessity, to escape in a little boat which was moored close by, and that would take her to a ship anchored in the gulf, which would convey her to Sweden.

It was decided that this alternative would not be resorted to unless all was lost, and at the same time it was agreed upon that in case the conspiracy was discovered, the conspirators would not await Peter's return to the capital, but would at once assemble the guards and proclaim her sole sovereign of All the Russias. This, however, was less to be feared than the impatience of the army, which might precipitate events; for rumours had spread among them that Catherine's life was in danger, and they were eager not only to save her but to gratify their own hatred against the Holstein soldiers at Oranienbaum, whom they would willingly have slaughtered. It, therefore, required all the tact and energy of the Princess Daschkaw to pacify them by assurances that her Majesty, with whom she was in daily communication, was perfectly safe. But not knowing what moment they might break into an insurrection, when the Empress's presence in the capital would be necessary to guide them and to secure her own safety, the Princess sent

a carriage to the farmhouse of one of her serfs, which was near Peterhoff, with instructions that it was to await there in readiness to take her on an excursion into the country; the real use for which it was intended being to convey the Empress to St. Petersburg when the time came for her flight from Peterhoff. This was sooner than was expected.

It happened that on the 27th of the month (June) news spread through the troops that the Empress had been arrested, when their excitement and eagerness for action became almost uncontrollable. One of his men coming to Captain Passik, assured him he had heard on good authority that her Majesty was in the gravest danger, and on being told that this was not the case he, still unsatisfied, and setting down Passik's calmness to apathy, went and repeated his words to another officer who was not in the conspiracy. Terrified that Passik had not ordered the arrest of a man who had shown some knowledge of a treasonable plot, this officer immediately went to their major and told him what had passed. As a result Passik was arrested. The Princess Daschkaw and Count Panin were holding a consultation at her house, when Gregory Orloff burst upon them with news that Passik had been arrested, though he had been unable to discover the cause of it. Panin was of opinion that it must be due to some military offence and had nothing to do with the conspiracy; but the Princess fearing

it was otherwise, ordered Orloff to hurry to the barracks and learn if Passik was guarded as a State criminal, or as a military offender.

When both men had left her she disguised herself in a great coat and set off on foot to consult Major Rasloffeff, another conspirator, but had not gone far before she saw a horseman riding at full gallop towards her. Although she had never seen him before she immediately recognised him as one of the Orloffs, and stopped him. When he pulled up short she told him her name, when in breathless sentences he said he was on his way to tell her that Passik was under arrest as a State prisoner, and was guarded by four sentinels at the door and two at each window of his room. At that she saw there was not a moment to be lost. With great presence of mind she bade him hurry to various captains of the Ismaeloffsky Guards, and advise them to be at their posts at the head of their men, to receive the Empress; and then to gallop with all speed to Peterhoff, taking on his way the carriage he would find in readiness at the farmhouse, and bring her Majesty back in it as soon as possible. No sooner had she finished than Alexis Orloff wheeled round his horse, apparently with the intention of obeying her, when she returned home where she remained in a state of suspense and excitement. An hour later and she was alarmed to hear a violent knocking at the street door, when on the visitor being admitted, she

saw another of the Orloffs, who came to ask if it were not premature to send for the Empress and alarm her.

At this the Princess burst into a rage with Alexis Orloff for daring to disobey the directions she had given him. As to his fears of alarming her Majesty, it would be better she should be brought fainting to St. Petersburg than that she should spend her life in prison or lose her head on the scaffold. The Princess peremptorily bade him tell his brother Alexis to ride without a moment's delay to Peterhoff, lest the Emperor should arrive in St. Petersburg before the Empress and frustrate all their schemes. The result was that at four o'clock on the following morning Catherine was quietly roused from sleep by Alexis, who had been given by his brother Gregory, a key which enabled him to enter her residence without rousing its inmates. His words were brief and abrupt. "It is time to get up; everything is prepared for proclaiming you," he said. When startled and excited she asked for details, he merely replied, "Passik has been arrested."

Hearing this and understanding all that it threatened, she quickly rose, dressed, and without waiting to make her toilette, noiselessly took her way to the entrance where the carriage he had brought awaited them. Into this she stepped, while he mounting the box, took the reins. Then knowing that everything in the world including life itself, depended on her making

the journey of thirty miles that lay between her and the capital without being overtaken and captured, and before Peter got there, Alexis drove furiously while the morning sky changed and glowed, and nature woke glorious and triumphant as if with promises of joy to the fugitive. Verst after verst was covered in silence, while her Majesty thought that at last, after years of subjugation, of patient endurance, of dissimulation, she was about to realise all she had waited for and foreseen. Soon she was roused from visions of the future to present anxieties, by noticing that the horses were becoming so fagged that it was plain they would not be able to continue the journey to St. Petersburg. Slow as their pace gradually became, it was brought to a stand when one of them fell from exhaustion. Then seeing that every moment of delay threatened her with danger, Catherine, impatient and resolute, sprang from the carriage, declaring she would walk the remainder of the way.

As luck would have it a country cart was at that moment sighted, when Alexis, rushing upon it, seized its horses and yoked them to the carriage. Then with spirits that rose as they neared the end of their journey, they hurried forward until within five versts of the city, when they saw another carriage driving rapidly towards them. As it came near they saw it contained Gregory Orloff, who becoming impatient and fearing some mishap was on his way in search

of Catherine. It was still early in the morning when both carriages passed through the empty streets and took their way to the barracks of the Ismaeloffsky Guards. There they saw but a dozen men and a drummer, who was instantly bidden to beat an alarm. No sooner had he done so than scores of soldiers, half-asleep and scarcely dressed, unkempt, noisy, tumbling over each other, rushed into the great hall, and seeing the Empress with the Orloffs beside her, understood that the moment they had so impatiently waited for had arrived. Wild with delight, boisterous, without ceremony, they rushed to her, kissed her hands, her dress, her feet, calling her their saviour, their little mother, and bidding her long to reign over them.

The chaplain of the regiment was then sought for, and on being found came carrying a cross, on which all the men took an oath of loyalty to the Empress. This being done with every sign of exhilaration and amid bewildering noise, she was led by Count Cyril Razumovsky to the carriage outside, which, when she had taken her place in it, was driven at a slow pace to the barracks of the Simeonofsky regiment, that was expected to join in the revolution. Before her carriage walked the chaplain with uplifted cross, around her were soldiers who cheered wildly, embraced each other, and ran backwards and forwards intoxicated with joy, while she was followed by the citizens who just waked

From an engraving by J. B. Fosseyeux, 1783.

from sleep by the tumult, rushed into the streets to join the throng. Before her Majesty gained her destination, the Simeonofsky regiment came running towards her, undisciplined and boisterous, with cries of *vivat*. Next came the Preobraginsky Guards, equally exultant, who explained that they had been kept back until then by their officers, four of whom they had brought with them as prisoners. And finally came the Horse Guards led by their officers, all in a delirium of joy. As the Empress knew that their commander, Prince George of Holstein, was detested by his men, and as she feared he might receive ill-treatment at their hands, she immediately sent some foot guards to protect him, and at the same time to take him a message from her, begging that he might remain in his own quarters. She had, however, been anticipated, for he had already been arrested by his own soldiers, who handled him somewhat roughly and pillaged his house.

Catherine now had about two thousand men around her, and had no further fear that any regiment in the capital would oppose her, the few officers who had done so having been already arrested by willing hands and imprisoned. She therefore went to the church of our Lady of Kasan still surrounded by a tempestuous crowd, which, if possible, became yet more enthusiastic at this proof of her piety. At the door of the Church she was met by the venerable Archbishop of Novgorod

in splendid vestments, a number of priests behind him. Bowing low before him to exhibit her reverence and receive his benediction, Catherine was conducted by him to the throne which had always been reserved for the sovereign. Then a Te Deum was chanted, prayers said, and a blessing given, after which the Empress went to the Winter Palace followed by a surging uproarious crowd. Here the Synod and the Senate assembled, and a manifesto was drawn up in haste, printed, and distributed throughout the capital. This stated that all true sons of Russia had clearly seen the grave danger to which the empire had been exposed; first because the foundations of the Orthodox religion had been threatened with destruction, so that there was reason to fear that the faith which had been established from the earliest times in Russia, would be changed for a foreign creed; secondly, because the glory which Russia had acquired at the price of so much blood, had been trampled under foot by the peace lately concluded with its most dangerous enemy; and thirdly because the domestic relations which were the bases of the country's welfare, had been entirely overturned. Overcome by the imminent perils with which her faithful subjects were menaced, and acceding to their sincere desire, Catherine had therefore, aided by divine justice, ascended the Sovereign Imperial throne of All the Russias, and had received a solemn oath of fidelity from her loving subjects.

It was yet early in the morning when the Princess Daschkaw, roused from a feverish sleep by the sound of hurrying feet and the calling of excited voices beneath her window, realised what had happened. Hurriedly rising she donned a gala dress and drove to the Winter Palace. As every approach to it was blocked by soldiers and civilians, it was impossible for her horses to make way, seeing which she got out, determined to force her path through the crowd. Before she proceeded very far she was recognised and in an instant lifted off her feet, and passed from hand to hand over the heads of those who hailed her as a friend and comrade and called down a thousand blessings on her. Nor was she set down until an anteroom was gained, when she found her dress torn, her ruffles in tatters, her hair dishevelled, in which condition she made her way to the Empress who warmly embraced her.

Then in a few brief words Catherine described her escape from Peterhoff, and the incidents of her journey to St. Petersburg, at which she laughed. Seeing that her Majesty had not yet decorated herself with the Order of St. Andrew, the highest in the State, which no woman was entitled to receive, but of which the reigning Sovereign was Grand Mistress, the Princess ran to Panin and borrowing his ribbon of that Order, threw it over the Empress's shoulder. In return the latter took the ribbon of St. Catherine

which she was wearing, and bestowed it on her friend.

There yet remained much to be done on this busy and memorable day. Every moment startled nobles arrived, who either from inclination or policy, congratulated the Empress and took the oath of fidelity to her. Among them from Peterhoff came the Great Chancellor, Count Woronzoff, with a distracted air; for not clearly understanding the extent of the revolution, he began to reprove the Empress for having come to St. Petersburg and made an enemy of her husband by trusting to the blind zeal of those who had risen against him; but before he had got very far, he was led away to take the oath of allegiance to her. Later in the day Count Alexander Schouvaloff and Prince Troubetzkoy were brought before her, they having come from Peterhoff to assure themselves that the regiments were loyal to Peter, and if possible to arrest his Consort; but they also were quietly led away to take the oath. Then a detachment of guards, headed by a trusted officer, accompanied Count Panin, who was sent to fetch the little Grand Duke Paul from a neighbouring palace where he had apartments. When the boy woke up to see his bedroom crowded with soldiers, he showed the greatest alarm, for he had often been told of the designs for disinheriting him which Peter had entertained, and now feared the worst. When, however, he saw his tutor bending

over him he became more calm, and readily prepared to go with him to the Empress. On arriving at the Winter Palace she led him to the balcony, where she embraced him and presented him to the people, who cheered enthusiastically.

Councils were held as to the proper means of guarding the city against the possible approach of Peter and his fifteen hundred Holstein soldiers, and as to how he could best be secured and a civil war averted. As a result men were stationed at equal distances from each other along the roads by which he could advance, so that notice could be given of his coming, and news of the insurrection might be prevented from reaching him; the waterways of the city were guarded; Admiral Talieszin was dispatched in haste to take possession of Cronstadt, lest Peter might seek safety in that fortress; and finally it was determined that Catherine at the head of her troops, should march to Peterhoff where her Consort, as was reported, had gone to celebrate his name feast. Owing to the heat of the day this march was not to take place until the cool of the evening. Before that time three soldiers, who had come from Peterhoff, were brought into her presence at their own request. These had been sent with a manifesto from Peter, with directions to distribute it among the people, instead of which they handed it to Catherine, telling her they were glad to have this opportunity

of joining their comrades and supporting her cause.

On that morning Peter, ignorant of what had passed either at St. Petersburg or at Peterhoff, set out for the latter place with Elizabeth Woronzoff, a number of other women, and his suite. His Majesty, who looked forward to the enjoyment of his feast, was in the highest spirits as he, followed by a number of carriages, drove along the dusty road towards Peterhoff. He had almost reached the gates of the Palace when he saw his Adjutant-General, Goudovitch, who had been sent on in advance, riding rapidly towards him. As he drew near he signed to the Czar's coachman to stop, when Peter, leaning forward asked him if he were mad. In reply Goudovitch bent down from his saddle and whispered news that was surprising enough to cause the Czar to leave the women, who had been entertaining him in the coach, and whom he ordered to drive on to the palace. He then impatiently turned to learn such details as Goudovitch had to tell him of the Empress. These were that she had disappeared in the early morning without the knowledge of any one in the palace save her confidential woman, who had kept the news secret as long as possible, by pretending that her Majesty was unwell and obliged to remain in her own apartments. This woman had since fled, none knew whither.

Hearing this, Peter went quickly to the palace, and

entering his wife's rooms searched for her under the bed and in the cupboards, in the hope that she might merely be in hiding. Then returning to the gardens where Elizabeth Woronzoff was, Peter said to her disconsolately, "Catherine has made her escape; I told you she was capable of anything"; to which came the reply, "Fool, if you had followed my advice and confined that bad woman, this could not have happened." As yet the object of her Majesty's flight could only be suspected, but the idea of an insurrection did not at this moment present itself in a threatening aspect to one who yet believed himself beloved by his army. While still in suspense as to what was happening in St. Petersburg, a man dressed as a peasant came into the grounds, and seeing the Emperor at once advanced and handed him a sealed note. This had been sent by a foreign barber and peruke maker named Breffan, a native of Monaco, who owing his fortune to the Czar, strove to repay him by sending information of what had happened in the capital, from whence his messenger had just been able to make his way, before the soldiers had been stationed on the roadway to prevent such intelligence from reaching his Majesty.

Amazed at the extent of the revolution and at the popularity of Catherine, whom he alternately despised and feared, he gave way to profound misgivings and depression. To comfort him, the Great Chancellor,

Count Woronzoff, said that though her Majesty might have influenced the guards to revolt, yet their action could not have any serious consequence, and if agreeable to him, he, Woronzoff, would go to St. Petersburg and bring her back with him. Grasping at hope in any shape, Peter urged him to go at once. What happened to Woronzoff has been seen. On his taking the oath of loyalty to Catherine, he was not allowed to return, but was kept a prisoner in his own house under guard.

Overcome by anxiety, wavering, unable to act, deprived of the martial spirit of which he had so often boasted, and surrounded by wailing women who deplored their association with him in his hour of peril, Peter could do nothing but stride up and down the garden, making plans that were unmade the next moment, dictating manifestoes that were never issued, cursing his wife, and threatening vengeance on all who had risen against him. The great banquet at which he was to have got gloriously drunk that day, was hateful to his thoughts ; the wailing sirens unnerved him ; and the conviction that he was an unworthy follower of his worthy master, in allowing himself to be dethroned by a woman, was as gall and wormwood to his shrinking soul. In a spasmodic outburst of energy he dispatched Count Alexander Schouvaloff and Prince Troubetzkoy on a mission which as has been related was fruitless ; three soldiers

who were sent with a manifesto which they were commanded to distribute among the troops, took it instead to Catherine. An order was issued to summon the Holstein troops in their full force from the neighbouring Oranienbaum.

Before they could reach Peterhoff, Marshal Münnich rode over, rumour having reached him of what had happened. Peter embraced him in his delight at seeing one whose mental strength he respected, and in whose loyalty he had confidence. Münnich gave him proof of these qualities, by advising that his Majesty should without delay place himself at the head of his Holstein troops and march to St. Petersburg, where those who were still faithful to him would arm themselves in his defence. The guards, the marshal said, had acted under an impulse, but would return to the service of their lawful sovereign when they saw him, the grandson of the glorious Peter the Great, in his capital. For a moment these words cheered Peter, and he resolved to act on them. But his suite were not so hopeful, and his sirens dreaded a departure which would leave them alone, meek lambs exposed to the vengeance of Catherine. Swayed by them he hesitated to act on Münnich's advice. The English Ambassador Keith, in speaking of the Czar at this time says, that "the perpetual hurry in which he lived, and the flattery he met from the vile people about him, had in some measure affected

his understanding." Otherwise it would be difficult to account for a pusillanimity and confusion that hastened his ruin.

While he yet hesitated, news was brought to him that the Empress was preparing to march at the head of twenty thousand men on Peterhoff. At that the women cried out afresh, and bade him return to Oranienbaum. Unwilling to expose himself to danger, Peter was eager to comply with their wishes, but Münnich had another suggestion to make. If, he said, his Majesty were unwilling to meet the rebels at the head of his troops, it would be unwise to stay either at Peterhoff or Oranienbaum, where there was no means of defence; but he should at once go to the island of Cronstadt where he had a fortress, a fleet, and a garrison, and where he could rally round him all who remained loyal to his cause. To this he immediately agreed, as did his women, who declared they would go with him, for both he and they now became desperately anxious to quit Peterhoff before Catherine arrived there.

Two yachts, which lay moored by the shore were instantly prepared, and he with his entourage got on board and set out for Cronstadt, which was about seven versts distant. Believing that a place of safety had been found, Peter and his sirens became more cheerful, until on coming near the island that rose dark and rocky from a placid sea, it was noticed that

cannon were pointed towards the entrance to the harbour, and that a part of the garrison under arms, lined the coast. And no sooner had his Majesty's yacht come within hailing distance, than a sentinel calling out asked who went there. "The Emperor" was the reply given. In an instant came the startling statement, "There is no Emperor." At that Peter jumped upon the deck, and throwing open his cloak so that the Orders which he habitually wore might be seen, cried out in astonishment, "What, do you not know me?" At that it seemed as if hundreds of voices from the shore shouted in the same breath, "We know no Emperor. Long live the Empress Catherine." As the yacht moved forward a voice called out that if her head was not put round, she would be fired upon and sunk. Stunned by what had passed the Czar looked at Münnich, who taking him by the arm as he might a child, bade him follow his example and jump on the shore to which they were now close; for none of his Majesty's soldiers would dare to fire upon him, and that Cronstadt could still be gained.

Peter was much too terrified to take this advice. Ordering a hasty retreat, he hurried to the cabin where his frightened women gathered round him. There he was followed by the faithful Münnich, who had another suggestion to make to a master whose cowardice must have appeared contemptible to this

brave old soldier. The latter, however, anxious to save if possible this helpless creature, advised him at once to make for the harbour of Revel, a town situated on the Gulf of Finland, and three hundred and forty versts from St. Petersburg. There he could join the squadron and sail with it to Pomerania, where a large number of his troops was stationed preparatory to marching on Denmark. If with these at his back he returned to St. Petersburg, Münnich promised that in six weeks his Majesty would be more firmly seated than ever on his throne. Before Peter could answer, his women cried out that the rowers who propelled the yacht would never have strength to reach Revel. "Well then we will take our turn at the oars," said this ancient warrior. But this they were not inclined to do, and persuaded by them the Czar gave orders to return to Oranienbaum.

They did not reach there until four o'clock in the morning, when Peter hurrying from his weary and frightened women folk, shut himself in his private room, having first given orders that his arrival was to be kept secret. Here with care and effort he wrote and rewrote a letter to his wife, in which he acknowledged his unjust behaviour to her, and promised to share with her the rulership of Russia. When eventually satisfied with his composition he came out of his apartment with a calmer, more assured air than he had shown since the news of Catherine's flight

had reached him; for he was now certain he had made an offer she could not fail to accept, and that by his diplomacy he had ended all strife between them. On seeing him, Münnich, brisk, erect, and trim, as if he had just turned out of bed, made another effort to induce the Czar to summon courage and to face the rebels at the head of his Holstein troops. "Come," he said cheerily, "let us meet them. I will go before you, and their swords shall not reach you until they have first passed through my body." Peter, however, was unwilling to risk his life, sending his letter to the Empress by the Vice-Chancellor, Prince Galitzin, he awaited her answer which he was sure would restore peace.

While these events were taking place, Catherine prepared to march at the head of her army, the favour of riding beside her being accorded to the Princess Daschkaw. That they might more fully identify themselves with the troops, each borrowed of an officer of the Preobraginsky Guards, a uniform such as had been worn by that regiment since the days of Peter the Great, until superseded by the Prussian uniform introduced by the present Czar. Before leaving St. Petersburg her Majesty, amid a scene of wild enthusiasm, reviewed twelve thousand troops. As she rode through the ranks a young officer of the horse guards named Patiomkin, seeing that her uniform was incomplete without a plume in her hat, rode up

to Catherine and offered her his own. She gracefully accepted it while the men cheered and Patiomkin's charger curveted and reared, as if to give her an opportunity of seeing to greatest advantage the skilful horsemanship and graceful figure of his rider, who from that moment impressed her Majesty, and who later was to become the rival of Gregory Orloff.

The review ended, the Empress rode forward, the Princess Daschkaw on her right, Count Cyril Razumovsky on her left, the troops behind her excited, singing, calling to each other, disordered. At Krasnoi Kabec, a little hamlet about ten miles from the capital, it was thought well to halt and rest the men, most of whom had been on foot some twelve hours. Catherine, who was as fatigued as any of them, took up her quarters in a little public-house, in the squalid parlour of which a bed was made up, principally of the cloaks of the officers. On this she lay down, but though weary was too excited to sleep, and passed the time in reading over rough copies of manifestoes which she was to issue. While engaged in this manner Peter's letter was brought to her. When she had read it, she decided that no answer should be returned, and that its bearer should be retained.

As the latter did not return to Oranienbaum, Peter grew anxious, especially when tidings were brought to him of the numbers who had swelled Catherine's

train. For a time he thought of disguising himself as a peasant and riding towards the frontiers of Poland, but as usual he hesitated, and ended by abandoning this intention. He, however, wrote her a second letter, very humbly owning his faults, asking her pardon, and offering to resign the throne in her favour. As a return he hoped she would allow him a pension, with liberty to retire to Holstein. This he entrusted for safe delivery to General Michael Ismaeloff, his chamberlain.

At five o'clock in the morning the Empress was once more in the saddle, and rode forward until she arrived at the monastery of St. Sergius, where a second halt was made. Here General Ismaeloff found her. No sooner had he been brought into her presence than, ready to betray his master, he fell upon his knees before Catherine who bade him rise. "Do you take me for an honest man?" he asked. On assuring him that she did, he said abruptly, "Well, then it is pleasant to have to do with sensible people. The Emperor offers to resign. I will bring him to you after his resignation which is entirely voluntary, and I shall save my country from a civil war," and with that he handed her the Emperor's letter. This intention to abdicate, simplified matters greatly, but in the opinion of Catherine and her advisers, it was thought that if his intentions were as he declared them to be, he must send her a voluntary and formal

renunciation of the throne, which could be made public. Major-General Ismaeloff undertook to obtain this, and at once hurried back to Oranienbaum for the purpose. He was accompanied to the gates of the park by Gregory Orloff, Captain Patiomkin, and a company of soldiers, who remained there while Ismaeloff entered alone and sought his Majesty.

Frightened and spiritless as the latter was, there remained little difficulty in getting him to write the following declaration, which was probably dictated to him. "During the short space of my absolute reign over the empire of Russia, I became sensible that I was not able to support so great a burden, and that my abilities were not equal to the task of governing so great an empire either as a sovereign or in any other capacity whatever. I also foresaw the great troubles which must then have arisen, and have been followed with the total ruin of the empire and my own eternal disgrace. After having therefore seriously reflected thereon, I declare without restraint and in the most solemn manner to the Russian empire and to the whole universe, that I for ever renounce the government of the said empire, never desiring hereafter to reign therein either as an absolute sovereign or under any other form of government; never wishing to aspire thereto, or to use any means of any sort for that purpose. As a pledge of which I swear sincerely before God and all the world to

this present renunciation, written and signed this 29th of June O. S. 1762."

Ismaeloff then assured Peter that the Empress would treat him well and allow him all that was necessary to his comfort, but that he must come to Peterhoff, where he would be quite safe against all affronts or attempts on his life from the excited soldiers. To this his Majesty agreed, and so abdicated as quietly as a child who had been sent to bed, to use the simile made by his worthy master. When the carriage was ready for his brief journey, he desired that Elizabeth Woronzoff and his aide-de-camp, General Gudovitch, might be allowed to accompany him, which was readily granted. And no sooner had he reached the park gates than Gregory Orloff, Patiomkin, and their men took their places before and behind the carriage, which made him at once realise that he was a prisoner. By the time he arrived at Peterhoff, the Empress had reached the palace, around which her troops were encamped. As he passed through them they at first met him with a sullen stare, but immediately after there burst upon his ears a ringing cry of "Long live Catherine." As she stepped from the carriage Elizabeth Woronzoff was taken charge of by two guardsmen, who roughly tore the ribbon of the Order of St. Catherine from her neck and led her away; while Peter, startled and speechless, was conducted up the grand staircase and taken to a remote

suite of apartments, in one of which dinner was served for him.

While here he was not allowed to see his consort, though he wrote her a couple of notes, in one of which he said he would ask for nothing save his mistress, his dog, his negro, and his violin ; the three last of which were sent to him. He had not been many hours at Peterhoff when a tumult broke out among the troops, on account of a rumour which said that Prince Troubetzkoy was endeavouring to make peace between the Emperor and his wife, which would be the ruin of them all. Before this was done they declared they would "cut that old rogue Troubetzkoy to pieces." Hearing this Catherine bade the Prince get into a coach and drive to St. Petersburg, which he did with all dispatch and in great fear, while she went among the men assuring them there was no truth in the report they had heard. It was while she was engaged in this way that the Princess Daschkaw, coming into her Majesty's apartments found Gregory Orloff stretched at full length on a sofa opening and reading state papers. Astonished at this, and always mindful of other people's business, she asked him what he was doing, and was told that the Empress had ordered him to look through the documents before him. On that he was peremptorily told such an order could not possibly have been given, and that her Majesty could not have intended them to be opened

until she had appointed some official for the purpose, and for that office he was not qualified. What answer he made is not recorded by the Princess who relates the incident, but keeping it in view it is not difficult to understand the strife that afterwards arose between her and the Orloffs. It was only later in the day when she saw the dinner table laid for three, and drawn up to the sofa where he lay, he having hurt his leg, that it flashed on her for the first time, he was Catherine's lover. The Princess's feelings of "extreme disapprobation" being visible in her face, the Empress asked her if anything was the matter, and was told, "nothing but the loss of sleep for the last fifteen nights, and extreme fatigue."

Next morning Peter was sent quietly away to the castle of Rapscha, which had been given to him when Grand Duke, and that his wife in writing to Poniatowski describes as "very retired, but very pleasant." The custody of his person was entrusted to Alexis Orloff, Captain Passik, Prince Theodore Bariatinsky, and a lieutenant of the Preobraginsky named Baskakoff. In this way was brought about without civil war or bloodshed, a revolution which placed an elective Sovereign on the throne of All the Russias, to which she had not the slightest claim, and to make room for whom the grandson of Peter the Great was dethroned.

On the day of Peter's departure from Peterhoff,

Catherine held there her first drawing-room as supreme Sovereign. This was attended by a large number of the nobility who had travelled from the capital the previous evening and that morning, as well as those belonging to her husband's suite and his woeful sirens, who had come over from Oranienbaum. Among the latter were the father and brothers of Elizabeth Woronzoff, who humbly cast themselves at the feet of her whom they had hoped to see disgraced and banished. For them the Princess Daschkaw asked mercy. "Pardon them, pardon my family, madame; you know I have sacrificed it to you," she said, on which the Empress bade them rise and gave them her hand to kiss. Then seeing Münnich she said to him, "Ah, marshal, it was you who wanted to fight me," to which he frankly replied, "Yes, madam. Could I do less for one who recalled me from banishment? Henceforth it will be my duty to fight for you, and you will find in me a fidelity equal to that with which I devoted my services to him;" at which she smiled and gave him also her hand, which he gallantly kissed.

By the advice of her counsellors she returned to St. Petersburg, for which however she did not set out until ten o'clock at night at the head of her troops, and rode, still in uniform, until she reached Prince Kourakin's country house, which stood half-way between Peterhoff and the capital. An officer having pulled off her boots, she flung herself on the only bed

the residence afforded, and rested for a couple of hours. Then before the sun was high in the sky, she was once more on horseback, a regiment of hussars in front of her, behind her the horse guards, who in turn were followed by the members of her Court in carriages, by the regiments of the guards according to seniority, and lastly by three regiments from the provinces. In this way she made a triumphal entrance into the capital, bells ringing from every church, cannon firing from the fortress, the windows and balconies along the route filled with crowds, who in exuberant joy waved banners and flung flowers before her, while deafening shouts of welcome went up from the mass of those who filled the streets, and trampled on each other in their efforts to approach and kiss her hands or her feet.

Amidst such a scene of wild enthusiasm she reached the Summer Palace where the Holy Synod awaited to greet and congratulate her. Then, ever mindful of her part, she quickly changed her uniform for a suitable dress and went to Mass, the day being Sunday. Crowds who admired her piety cheered her once more ; while on her entering the church her ears were greeted by scores of jubilant voices singing a Te Deum. On her return to the palace crowds flocked round her and through its rooms all day long. As she had, to use her own words, "scarcely eaten or drunk, or slept since six o'clock on Friday morning, I was very glad to be able to retire to rest on Sunday

night." But rest was denied her, for at midnight Captain Passik entered her bedroom and woke her without ceremony, saying that the soldiers were horribly drunk, that one of them had run among his fellows crying, out "To arms; three thousand Prussians are coming to carry off our little mother"; in answer to which they had all seized their arms and were in a state of wild commotion which neither Marshal Razumovsky nor the Orloffs could subdue, and that nothing would pacify them but a sight of the Empress. At that she rose quickly, dressed, and prepared to go to them. Lest a panic might arise when she was seen to leave the palace, she first went to the battalion guarding it, and explained why she was up and about at such an hour, and then entering a carriage drove to the barracks of the guards, where she was welcomed by a delirious outburst of cheers. Treating the soldiers as unruly and troublesome children, she bade them go to bed, and hoped they would allow her to have some rest as she had not slept for three nights. They explained they had been scared by a cry that the cursed Prussians were upon them, and that they were willing to die for her. To this she said in a matter-of-fact manner, "Very well then, I am very much obliged to you, but go to bed"; upon which says she, "they wished me good-night and good health, and went off like lambs, every now and then turning to look back at my carriage as they went."

CHAPTER VIII

The first days of Catherine's reign—Rewards to the conspirators—General Betskoy and the Crown—The fate of Peter's mistress—News of Peter's death reaches the Empress—Her words to the Princess Daschkaw—General opinion regarding the Emperor's death—Alexis Orloff's letter—The King of Prussia's opinion of the Orloffs—Catherine's letter to Count Poniatowski—Statement as to Peter's death made to the foreign Ministers—Poniatowski desires to return to Russia—Her Majesty's answer—A reaction in public feeling—Catherine prepares for her Coronation—Sir Robert Keith is recalled from Russia—Arrival of the new English Ambassador, Lord Buckinghamshire—The account of his journey to Moscow—The Ambassador's residence—He is presented to the Sovereign—His opinion of Her Majesty—She visits various monasteries—Gregory Orloff and his brothers become unpopular—Her Majesty undertakes to form the favourite's mind—Lord Buckinghamshire's opinion of him—His influence is desired in favour of England—Present made him by the British Government—His overwhelming vanity—He boasts of his power and aspires to share the throne of Russia—A petition requesting Her Majesty to marry—Her answer—Opposition to the project—Conspiracy to murder Gregory Orloff—Its failure due to a mistake.

DURING the first days of Catherine's reign, crowds of courtiers flocked to the Summer Palace, all filled with curiosity, expectancy, excitement, wonder, or elation. As might have been supposed

from one who was lavishly generous and liberal, rich rewards were given to those who had helped her to the throne. Nikita Ivanovitch Panin was made a count, given five thousand roubles, and appointed first member of the College of Foreign Affairs, which secured him a power in the management of the empire not second to that of Woronzoff, the Great Chancellor, or of Prince Galitzin, the Vice-Chancellor, both of whom were allowed to retain their offices. The Princess Daschkaw was not only decoratcd with the Order of St. Catherine, and appointed a lady-of-honour to the Empress, but had her husband's debts that amounted to twenty-four thousand roubles paid, while he was given the command of a regiment of cuirassiers of which her Majesty was colonel. Count Cyril Razumovsky, though already very wealthy, was presented with five thousand roubles; Ivan Orloff was made a count and senator; Alexis Orloff was made an admiral; and Gregory Orloff, the Empress's lover, was appointed Grand Master of Artillery, Director General of Fortifications, Chevalier of St. Alexander Nefsky, and at the request of the Empress, was created Prince of the Empire by Maria Teresa of Austria. Twenty-four officers were given estates, and as the finances of the Imperial treasury were at a low ebb, many other conspirators were paid in human lives by being presented with six hundred serfs each; while Passik was raised to the rank of Chamberlain.

As may be supposed, there remained many who considered that their services in bringing about the revolution had not been sufficiently recognised. Among these was General Betzkoy, who one day gaining access to her Majesty and flinging himself on his knees before her, begged that she would confess to whom she owed her throne. "I owe my elevation to Almighty God," said Catherine piously, "and to the election of my subjects." At that he quickly rose saying, "I am the most unfortunate of men, since your Majesty does not acknowledge me as the only person to whom you owe your crown. Was it not I who influenced the guards? Was it not I who scattered money among the people?" Though Catherine thought that recent events had disturbed his mind, she had far too much tact to let her opinion be known, or to contradict one whose influence might prove useful, but with a grave manner replied to him, "I acknowledge the full extent of my obligations, and since it is to your services I owe my crown, to whose care can I so properly commit it as to yours? Its arrangement for my coronation will be entrusted to you, under whose direction I place all the jewellers in my empire," for which commission he warmly expressed his gratitude, and went his way rejoicing.

Though bountiful to those who had favoured her cause, Catherine was not revengeful on those who had offended or opposed her. To Elizabeth Woronzoff,

who had openly insulted her, and had made no secret of the hope of succeeding her, the Empress may be said to have been merciful. On being taken from the carriage in which she had ridden beside the Czar to Peterhoff, Elizabeth was allowed to proceed to St. Petersburg, where she took refuge in her father's house, much to his dissatisfaction. There she awaited her fate in fear and trembling; but her apprehensions were unfounded, for Catherine merely ordered her rival to quit the capital for her father's country estate near Moscow. She was still there when a couple of years later she found a husband, to whose first child, as a mark of clemency, the Empress allowed the Grand Duke to stand sponsor.

Her Majesty's treatment of Baron Goltz, Peter's friend and adviser, was equally handsome, for she at once sent an officer of the Court to assure him he had nothing to fear, and might either remain at Oranienbaum or return to the capital, when to insure his safety she would give him an escort and a guard. General Gudovitch was also well treated; while one of her first acts as Sovereign had been to send post haste for her old friend Bestuzhev, whom she warmly welcomed, to whom she gave a pension of twenty thousand roubles a year, and appointed him General Field-Marshal. This being done, a manifesto was issued, in which her husband's inability to rule, his love of Germany, his dislike of the religion and usages

of Russia, and his intention of imprisoning her and setting aside her son from the succession, were dwelt on in detail, and in which she declared that her accession to the throne of All the Russias was a manifest proof that when sincere hearts strove for good, the hand of God directs them.

On the seventh day after Peter had been taken to Rapscha, news reached his wife that he was dead. This came at a moment when she was about to attend a meeting of the Senate, which she thought it inadvisable to postpone. Shocked as she must have been, and mindful of the stigma that calumny would not hesitate to fix on her in connection with this sudden event, yet she exerted sufficient restraint to assume an appearance of calmness and to listen to important matters of State being discussed. As soon as possible, however, she retired, and summoning Count Cyril Razumovsky, Count Panin, and Gregory Orloff, consulted with them as to whether the tidings should at once be communicated to the people, or kept back until the following day. The latter was decided on. When twenty-four hours later her Majesty was dining in public, a messenger entered the room and announced to her that the Emperor was no more, at which she rose, burst into tears, dismissed the Court, and retiring to her room showed every mark of grief. There she was found by the Princess Daschkaw, to whom she at once said, " My horror at this death is inexpressible,

it is a blow which strikes me to the earth." The answer was, "It is a death too sudden, madam, for your glory or for mine." The general opinion at the time, expressed by the princess, by the English Ambassador and others, was that Peter had been strangled by Alexis Orloff, though they did not believe her Majesty to have instigated or countenanced the crime. On the contrary the Princess says that those who suspected the Empress of having directed or connived at the murder of her husband, would find proof of the injustice of their suspicions in a letter she received from Alexis Orloff written immediately after he had committed the deed. "Its style and incoherence," says the Princess, "mark strongly, in spite of his drunkenness, the terror and wildness of his apprehensions, while he solicits pardon for the act in the most supplicatory language." This letter, according to the same authority, was carefully preserved by Catherine, and after her death was seen by her son and successor Paul, who on reading it made the sign of the cross and raising his eyes to heaven said, "God be praised. The doubts I had on this subject relative to my mother are now dissipated."

Frederick II., who had no illusions about Catherine, also exonerated her of all participation in this crime. Though ready to declare that she had no religion even while she acted the devotee, and that, though she had more sense than Peter, her inclinations were

the same as his, the Prussian monarch in writing to Count Segur says that, crowned and free, she thought like an inexperienced young woman that all was finished, and that so pusillanimous an enemy as her husband did not seem dangerous. "But the Orloffs, more audacious and more clear-sighted, being unwilling that this prince should be made a rallying-point against them, have put him out of the way. The Empress was ignorant of the fact, and learnt it with a despair which was not feigned ; she correctly foresaw the judgment which all the world now passes upon her, for the error of this judgment is and must be indelible, since in her situation she has reaped the fruits of their crime, and has been obliged in order to have support, not only to spare, but even to retain about her person, the authors of the crime, since they alone had been able to save her."

No doubt Frederick, who was kept well informed of all that passed at the Court of St. Petersburg, by the Foreign Ministers and his spies, gives a correct statement of the case, though it differs from that made by Catherine to Poniatowski in one of her private letters to him. In this she says that her husband's terror at being arrested brought on dysentery, which continued for three days and stopped on the fourth. On that day he drank to excess, when "the hæmorrhoidal colic again came on, accompanied by delirium. He was two days in this condition, which

was followed by excessive weakness, and notwithstanding the efforts of the physicians, he at last sank, demanding a Lutheran clergyman. I was afraid the officers might have poisoned him, so much was he hated. I had him opened, but not a trace of poison could be discovered. The stomach was very healthy, but the bowels were inflamed, and he had been carried off by a stroke of apoplexy. His heart was excessively small and also dried up."

The account of Peter's death received by the Foreign Ministers was to the same effect, and ran as follows :— "The Imperial Ministry of Russia think themselves obliged to inform the Foreign Ministers that the ci-devant Emperor having had a violent colic with which he was frequently incommoded, died yesterday. The Emperor died at a small country house belonging to the crown, and his body was transported from thence in the night between Sunday and Monday to the Newsky monastery, where he now lies exposed to public view, and thousands of people crowd thither to see him." For three days the remains of the late Emperor, dressed in the unform of a Holstein officer, lay in semi-state in the monastery church of St. Alexander Nefsky. At the end of that time, on July 21st, 1762, N.S., the date he had fixed for his departure from St. Petersburg to make war on Denmark, he was laid in a grave before the altar of the church, the Court officials and the Holstein troops

attending the ceremony. It may be added that the Court of his "worthy master," who owed him so much did not go into mourning for him, nor indeed any other Court save Sweden, to whose throne he had been heir. The day following that of his interment the Holstein soldiers were sent home to their own country, but the vessel in which they embarked foundered soon after they had left the harbour of Cronstadt, when numbers of them were lost. Prince George was also sent home, but was made administrator of the affairs of Holstein, where he lived for the remainder of his life and served the Empress faithfully.

From the time when Poniatowski had been taken from her by unsympathetic statesmen, Catherine had regularly corresponded with him whom she sincerely loved, and of whom she frequently spoke to her confidants with tears in her eyes. It was therefore not surprising that no sooner was she supreme Sovereign than he, too far removed to understand the difficulties that surrounded the Empress, wrote at once to beg that she would allow him to rejoin her. To this she did not consent, not from want of affection but from policy, being unwilling to give Gregory Orloff, who with his brothers had much influence over the guards, the slightest cause for jealousy or displeasure. She therefore wrote to Poniatowski telling him that she could not and would not tell him all the obstacles that existed against his return to St. Petersburg. Her

situation was such she declared, that she had to be extremely careful. The least soldier of the guards who saw her said to himself, "See the work of my hands." She was frightened to death she added at the letters he wrote to her; he must believe in her unceasing friendship, and she assured him that in case the crown of Poland, which was elective, became vacant, she would use all her endeavours to procure it for him.

During the first months of her reign and before her grasp had tightened on the sceptre, Catherine was obliged to be watchful and careful. On the death of Peter a reaction had set in among the people, which spread to a part of the army. The grandson of their idol Peter the Great, had been put out of the way, it was said, to make room for a stranger; it was remembered that Ivan, a grand-nephew of Peter the Great yet lived, though imprisoned in the fortress of Schlusselburg; it was stated that the late Czar's son, the Grand Duke Paul, had his place upon the throne usurped by his mother; and the overwhelming insolence of the Orloffs was resented. The result was that a latent spirit of ill-humour and discontent fermented among the guards, which at last broke into open rebellion one night in August, as we learn from a dispatch of Sir Robert Keith, who in giving an account of it says, "The soldiers of the Ismaeloffsky, having beat to arms at midnight, were with great

difficulty brought to reason by their officers. The same spirit showed itself, though in a less degree, two nights successively, and gave great uneasiness to the Government. However, partly by fair means and partly by foul, great numbers of officers and soldiers have been taken up and carried out of the way. Things are so far settled that the danger for the present seems over."

Meantime the Empress prepared for her coronation, which she desired to surround with all possible pomp According to ancient custom this was to take place in Moscow, formerly the capital. Before leaving St. Petersburg every precaution was taken to secure peace and loyalty in her absence, the guards being left under the charge of Count Cyril Razumovsky on whose fidelity she could rely; she having first assembled them before her that she might assure them of her faith in their loyalty and her warm regard for them; while the city was entrusted to the care of Count Bruce in whom she had implicit confidence; and the Grand Duke, though ill of a scorbutic complaint, was taken with her, as were also all the nobles of whose friendship or loyalty the slightest suspicion was entertained. Followed by a splendid train of statesmen, soldiers, nobles, and courtiers, and accompanied by the Princess Daschkaw, and Gregory Orloff, she and her suite travelled in enormous coaches over ninety in number, and with six hundred and fifty horses to draw them over the

rough roads; while close in her wake and carefully guarded, followed twenty stout barrels, containing six hundred thousand pieces of silver, to defray her expenses and to scatter among the people. This cavalcade entered Moscow amid every sign of rejoicing The coronation, which took place in the cathedral of the Assumption on September 23rd (1762) was marked by solemnity and magnificence, the Archbishop of Novgorod with his group of attendant priests vestmented in cloth of gold moving to and fro in the glow of innumerable lights and amid clouds of incense, as he celebrated Mass within the Holy of Holies; choruses of unaccompanied voices rising in jubilation; a throng of barbaric nobles and representations of her Armenian, Calmuck, Baltic, and Cossack subjects in costumes of Oriental splendour and blazing with superb jewels, grouped around the central enthroned figure of a woman small in stature, with neck erect and glittering eyes, who unable to claim descent from their Sovereigns, differing in race from themselves, not born in their faith, had no claim to the fidelity they swore to her, to the abject homage they paid her, to the crown which she with firm hands and triumphal gesture placed upon her own head amid exultant cries, but who by her ability had made herself supreme over their brute force and lesser intelligences, marshalling, commanding, guiding and using them for her own exaltation.

The only representative of the great foreign Powers not present at the coronation, was the English Ambassador. It so happened that Sir Robert Keith, who had been at St. Petersburg since 1758, had for some time desired to retire from the diplomatic service in which he had been employed for fourteen years, and to spend the remainder of his life in that peace which no Court could give. The recent revolution and the accession of Catherine had quickened this wish, for as he had been a friend and adviser of Peter, he foresaw that he could hope for little favour from the new Sovereign. And although on the first reception which the Empress gave to the foreign Ministers a few days after she had seized upon the throne, she had on his kissing her hand and wishing her a happy reign, given him a friendly smile and replied in gracious terms, yet, as he says in a letter to Sir Andrew Mitchell, "la grande dame est trop prévenue contre moi pour en revenir. Je sais cela sans pouvoir en douter. Cependant avec la fierté qui convient á un Ecossais je ne m'estime pas moins pour cela." In writing on July 3rd to George Greville, Secretary of State, Sir Robert declares he is not so happy as to be in the Empress's favour, which obliges him as a faithful servant of the King to say that he considered his Majesty's affairs would suffer by passing through his hands; and he therefore thought it desirable that he should be recalled as soon

as possible and another Minister sent in his place; "for I should think myself very unhappy if any part of the King's business should miscarry from any defect in my person, either real or in the opinion of the new sovereign of this country."

In August 1762 John Hobart, second Earl of Buckinghamshire, was as his successor appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. Petersburg. No fitter choice it was believed could have been made, with a view to winning Catherine's personal preference, than this young and singularly handsome man who could boast of many accomplishments, was remarkable for his gracious manner, and had been Comptroller to the King's Household, and Lord of the Bedchamber under George II. To aid him in making a favourable impression on the high officials of the Court, and to bring about an alliance between his own country and Russia, the sum of fifty thousand pounds was placed at his service. It had been Lord Buckinghamshire's desire and hope to reach Moscow in time for the coronation; but having journeyed by sea to Cronstadt, he did not reach St. Petersburg until September 24th, too late to attend that ceremony.

From his "Dispatches, Correspondence, and Memorandum," published by the Royal Historical Society and edited in a scholarly manner by Adelaide D'Arcy Collyer, we learn that it was not until after "a great

deal of fasting, some praying, nine days and as many nights driving through the most detestable roads in the universe, covered with snow just frozen enough to let us through," that he reached Moscow on October 20th, when he was conducted to a residence hired for him by a friendly countryman of his own, who to make sure of it, had paid a half-year's rent in advance for "a most wretched, ruinous house, furnished with no fixtures, nor any movables but rats and bugs," which, though detestable animals in themselves, he pitied when he considered "what they hourly suffer from the inclemency of the weather." As soon as he had settled himself in this uncomfortable abode, he sent his secretary to the Vice-Chancellor, Prince Galitzin, and to the Master of Ceremonies, when arrangements were made for an early audience with her Majesty.

Four days later an Imperial carriage was sent to conduct him to the palace, when Catherine received him with extreme graciousness and listened patiently to the assurances he delivered—as directed by his instructions in English, not a word of which she understood—of the King of England's affectionate esteem for those eminent qualities which adorned her, and of his determined resolution to omit nothing which might tend to cultivate that harmony and confidential friendship which appeared to him so essentially necessary to the mutual interests and well-being of

the two nations. Her Majesty's answer, according to custom, was given him in Russ, of which language he was completely ignorant. Later on at a drawing-room held that evening, they conversed in French, when Catherine asked him many questions about England, and did him the honour of playing a game of picquet with him. He had been told that the Empress had been greatly altered by the cares and anxieties she had recently experienced, and by the fact that the Grand Duke was in a very bad state of health; and he noticed that she seemed "to have a settled melancholy upon her countenance." She mentioned to him, he says, "that she has lately found herself absent in company, and that the habit imperceptibly grew upon her, she knew not why." Her appearance must, he thought, prejudice in her favour any one who approached her; while "affability and dignity are blended in her manner, which inspires you at once with ease and respect. When the hurry, the inevitable consequence of a revolution is over, she has every talent to make this a great and powerful country," says he.

Within a few weeks of her coronation, the Empress made journeys to several monasteries in the district of Moscow, at whose shrines she made an ostentatious show of devotion. But notwithstanding this and other efforts to secure the loyalty and affection of her subjects, a large section of them was disturbed and

discontented. And here again, as at St. Petersburg, the troops became turbulent and riotous ; an intended outbreak was discovered by mere accident and quietly suppressed ; while six officers of the guards who had used disloyal and threatening language, were tried by the Senate, ordered to be broken with indignity, and to be executed ; but the Empress was unwilling that the latter part of the sentence should be carried out, and instead they were exiled for life to a distant region of Siberia. With the officers at least, much of this discontent was owing to the insolent and domineering sway exercised by Gregory Orloff and his brothers, who taking to themselves the glory of having brought about the revolution, were determined that their influence and importance should be felt and acknowledged ; conduct that made them intolerable to those who from their abilities, rank, and situation, thought themselves better entitled to the Empress's favour.

Accustomed to the ways of barracks, uneducated, dissipated, with little intelligence, spending their days in gambling, carousing, and fighting, they settled arguments by the simple method of blows, and were resolved to hold the positions which they regarded as the just reward for having risked their lives in placing Catherine on the throne. At the beginning of her reign her Majesty had expressed her intention of instructing and forming the mind of this Hercules,

Gregory, who thought that the arts, sciences, and manufactures, were prejudicial to a great country, as they enervated the minds and bodies of its inhabitants, and who was anxious to establish boxing matches in Moscow, after the fashion that was then the vogue in England. The English Ambassador, who mentions this fond intention of the Sovereign regarding her lover, says that she succeeded so far as to teach him to think and to reason, but not to think justly or to reason rightly, "as he had only obtained that sort of light which dazzles but will not guide." He adds that it was more than probable the Empress wished she had left Gregory just where she had found him, for one result of her tuition was that he had begun to show an air of stiffness and surliness not natural to his character. "He neglects his person, smokes, hunts frequently, and is not so unobservant of the beauties he meets with as policy makes necessary and gratitude should enforce. It is asserted, but falsely, that the object to whom his whole attention should be dedicated is unmindful of transitory infidelities."

Anxious to discover if her Majesty were really indifferent to the attentions paid by the favourite to others of her sex, Lord Buckinghamshire broached the subject to a lady who, without being handsome, was attractive because of her youth, whom Gregory Orloff distinguished by his preference, and who for all

that was invited to join the Imperial parties when the Court went into the country. Her reply was that her affection for another man as well as her prudence, made her discourage Gregory Orloff's advances; and "that lately in the country, upon the Empress coming into the room where he was attempting to romp with her, she was a little confused, upon which the Empress came behind her and leaning upon her shoulder whispered, 'Don't be embarrassed, I am convinced of your discretion and your regard for me. You need not fear making me uneasy, on the contrary I think myself obliged to you for your conduct." That Catherine, proud and sensitive, should condescend to this, shows that she must have loved Gregory Orloff.

While testifying to her many accomplishments, her superiority of mind, her incredible attention to business, and her ardent desire for the prosperity of her country, Lord Buckinghamshire points out two capital errors in her character, "which are equally evident and inexcusable, the meekness with which she submits to the ill-bred inattention of Orloff, and the little affection she shows to the Grand Duke." For all that, scarce a day passed that she did not grant Orloff some fresh mark of distinction. His influence was so great with her that, desiring to win his good regard for England, Lord Buckinghamshire suggested that a watch set with diamonds to the value of about five hundred pounds

might be sent to him from that country. This was acted upon by the British Government, though the good effect it was supposed to ensure was afterwards found to be more than counterbalanced by the greater liberality of the French Court.

His conduct, not only towards her Majesty, but to the courtiers with many of whom he quarrelled, arose from a belief of his supreme power over the guards, and of the inability of any one to remove him from the proud but scarcely appreciated post of Imperial favourite. As a proof of his overwhelming vanity it is mentioned by Castera in his rambling *Life of the Empress Catherine*, that having drunk too much wine one night while at supper with her Majesty, Count Cyril Razumovsky, and other courtiers, Gregory Orloff in boasting of his influence over his men said, that though he had brought about the revolution, he could if he chose undo his own work in a month; to which Count Cyril replied, "My friend, within a fortnight we would have hanged you." After this it is not surprising to hear that he desired to sit on the throne of All the Russias with Catherine. Not having the intelligence to organise or execute a project of this kind, he broached it to old Bestuzhev, who never was more happy than when organising plots or carrying on surreptitious designs; and who now declared that he saw no reason why her Majesty should not reward the man who had given her the throne, by

sharing it with him; especially as he would of all men be best able to support and defend it against conspiracies. His extensive views regarding his own recompense, if his tactics succeeded, were not at the moment mentioned by Bestuzhev.

Without loss of time he drew up a petition to the Czarina, in which, having referred to the uncertain health of her only surviving child, the heir to the crown, he humbly begged that she would give the empire an additional testimony of her love, by sacrificing her own liberty to its welfare, and taking a husband. It was discreetly added that if her Imperial Majesty's choice fell on one of her subjects, she would merely follow the practice of Russian Sovereigns.

This he signed himself, and then took it to the Great Chancellor Count Woronzoff, who, a timid man, was shocked at the proposal which he declined to second. Count Cyril Razumovsky to whom it was next shown was yet more indignant while Count Panin protested against it. It was, however, signed by several nobles who either feared the powerful Orloffs, or who counted on rewards if the petition was listened to with favour by their sovereign. Before it could be formally presented to her, she was waited on by Woronzoff, Razumovsky, and Panin who telling her of Bestuzhev's intention, added that they came to protest against her marriage with Gregory

Orloff, the subject whom it was meant she should take for a husband. There can be little doubt that Catherine, whose love of liberty was boundless and who already had found charm in variety, had little desire to make Gregory Orloff her husband and share with him the power so dear to her. According to the Princess Daschkaw, her Majesty assured her advisers that she had no intention of marrying the favourite, and referring to Bestuzhev said, "I never authorised that intriguing old man to act as he has done."

All this took place in the early spring of 1763, while she was yet at Moscow. The English Ambassador who heard of it says, that in consequence of the opposition raised to the marriage, it was dropped for the present, "but it is imagined it will be renewed at St. Petersburg, and may have very serious consequences if urged too far. People of all ranks are displeased with the great favour shown to the Orloff family, and express their dissatisfaction much more freely than has been usual in this country." The court, however, did not return to St. Petersburg until the end of June 1763, the delay being probably caused by the Empress giving birth to a son ; and meanwhile practical proof was afforded to her Majesty of the unpopularity of the proposed marriage, which her subjects were led to believe she desired. To many of them it seemed that the removal of Gregory Orloff, was the

shortest and most certain way to prevent it. A conspiracy was therefore entered into, when the sentinel who guarded the favourite's bedroom at the palace was bribed to admit three men, whose intention it was to murder him while he slept. But fate protected him, for owing to a mistake regarding the hour at which he was to be delivered to them, the sentinel who had been ready to betray Orloff had been relieved by another, and this latter seeing three men stealthily advancing towards him down the semi-darkened corridor, and knowing nothing of their purpose, raised an alarm at which they took flight.

These conspirators were never discovered, but the Orloffs being alarmed kept their eyes and ears wide open in the expectancy of detecting foes. As a result a young officer named Fedor Hetroff, who had taken a prominent part in the revolution was arrested. Though he could not be identified with the midnight visitors to the palace, he volunteered the information that even if his death followed the next moment, he would not hesitate to plunge a dagger into Gregory Orloff's heart, rather than see him on the throne of Russia. For this speech Fedor Hetroff was banished to Siberia.

In the four and thirty years of her life, Catherine had known many momentous events, many singular experiences; but others no less strange, scarce less

exciting were to attend to its close the reign of this superb actress, this indomitable woman, whom fate uplifted, smiled upon, and strengthened for the playing of a great part.

END OF VOL. I

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